

VOLUME 2
NUMBER 6

BY
NELSON S. BOND

THE GENIUS OF LANCELOT BIGGS

Fantastic Adventures

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BACK
COVER

JUNE
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DR. DESTINY
MASTER OF
THE DEAD

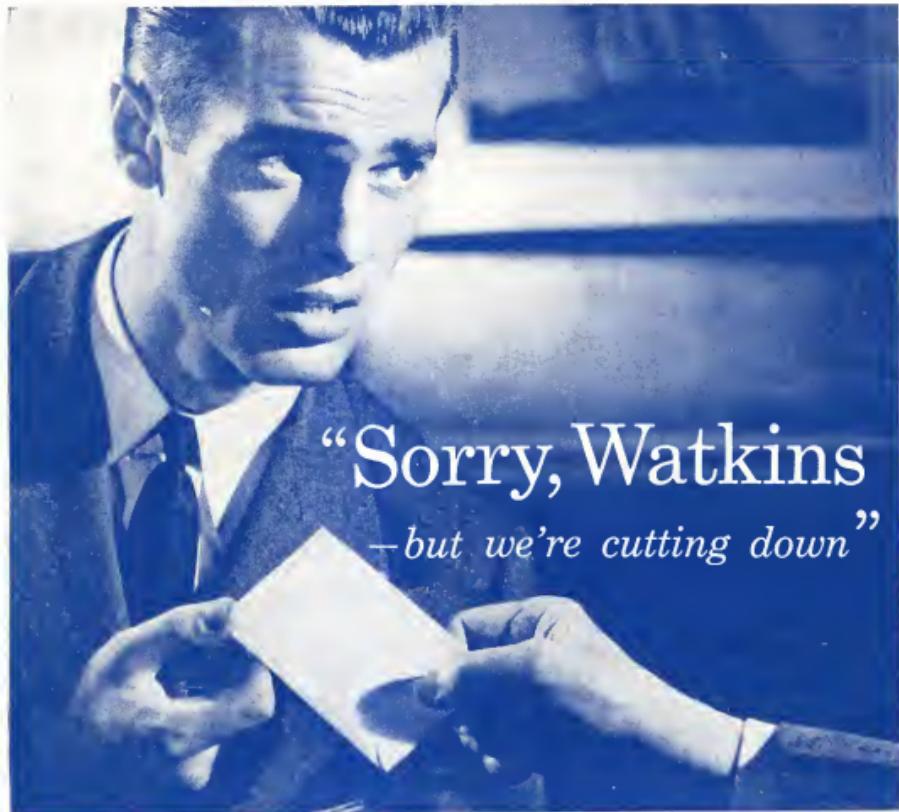
BY
Robert Moore Williams



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ROSS ROCKLYNNE ★ THORNTON AYRE

JUNE
1940

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES



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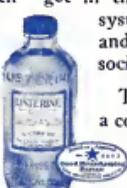
conditions, most cases, say some authorities, are due to the fermentation of tiny food particles that may take place even in normal mouths.

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STREET.....

CITY OR TOWN..... STATE.....

Fantastic Adventures

VOL. 2
NO. 8

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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JUNE 1940

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VOLUME 2
NUMBER 4

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THREE isn't much doubt in your editor's mind that he surprised quite a few of you with this month's edition of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES in its new handy size.

Naturally, there is a good reason for this change, and as rapidly as it was carried out is only an indication of the speed with which we comply with reader demand.

Recently you have been saying in no uncertain terms: "FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is too large to handle. Won't you cut it down to the same size as your sister magazine, Amazing Stories?"

And so, we did! You asked for it; here it is. Not only have we given you that, but we have added 48 extra pages, so that, in fact, you are getting more reading matter than before.

We think you will like your magazine in the new format, and we know you'll like the swell lineup of stories in this and future issues!

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS, who wrote our cover story this month, had to write two stories before we finally got one that fit the cover, which was painted without a story in mind! The one you will read in this issue was written in three days' time!

And that, dear readers, is fast work for a really fine story, we think you'll agree.

RECENTLY our New York Editorial Representative, Mr. David Vern, who has so much to do with securing many of these Fantastic stories, was embarrassed by the refusal of the telegraph company to accept a telegram to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES' editorial office, without an explanation and an identification. And no wonder! Because the telegram read: "Shipping Corpse That Walks At Night To Replace Laboratory Monsters."

After a lot of red-faced explaining, Mr. Vern was allowed to proceed on his way, but with many suspicious glances cast in his direction.

Mr. Vern said later: "I felt like a ghoul!"

WE might point out that Thornton Ayre has written that long awaited sequel to "The Golden Amazon," and we present it to you with this issue. It's "The Amazon Fights Again," and your editors believe that Mr. Ayre has presented this well-liked character in a story you'll enjoy.

Anyway, we'd like to hear from you about it, and if Violet Ray appeals to your imagination, we'll see that she performs again!

WHAT'S fantastic about worms? you might ask. Plenty! Did you know that when a worm is decapitated, the body grows a new head, the old head a new body.

THE theory that accounts for this miraculous regeneration, shared by many lower animals, is that their bodies contain "totipotent" cells—undifferentiated cells capable of growing into any organ or structure needed. And now it is believed that higher animals—including man—have these same cells!

Wait, little Rollo! Stop that! Take that knife away from your neck! You haven't heard the rest . . .

In man, the effect of evolution has been to weaken this regenerative process. The totipotent cells are inhibited in their work by our highly developed mechanism for healing wounds, which immediately seals injured places with scar tissue. This stops growth or replacement—so give up the idea of emulating the worm! Fooling around with a knife will only get you a neat collection of missing digits.

But, seriously, scientists do have hope—and not without reason—that they can slow down the normal healing process and actually give regeneration a chance to replace an eye or leg lost by accident.

In which case we doubt that anyone will ever again mind being called a worm.

(Concluded on page 41)

Fantastic Adventures

NEXT ISSUE
will be dated
AUGUST
and will appear on the stands
JUNE 20th
Don't Miss the August Issue
in the New Handy Size
48 Extra Pages

Dr. Destiny, MASTER OF THE DEAD

By ROBERT MOORE
WILLIAMS



WHOMO was the mysterious Doctor Destiny, and what did he have to do with Marcia Welling's disappearance? Kent Wade swore to find out.

Marcia walked through
the wood as though in
a hypnotic trance



"I'LL find out if this damned doctor knows what's happened to Marcia," Kent Wade said grimly. His lean, almost ascetic face, set in tense harsh lines that completely obliterated his youthfulness. He was a chemist, and a rising star in his profession.

Marcia Welling had disappeared. Marcia Welling, Kent's fiancee. They were to have been married in September. Just two more months—But Marcia was gone, and even the expert detective work of Boh Hanagan had not yielded a clue to her whereabouts.

"Look, Kent," Hanagan said, seizing the youthful chemist by the shoulder.

Kent Wade faced the detective. Hanagan was older than he, more experienced. Even more important Hanagan was Kent's friend, had been his friend since the detective had come to him with the request for an amazingly intricate bit of chemical analysis, which Kent had performed. That had been four years in the past, but during those four years their acquaintanceship had ripened into warm friendship. Each respected the abilities of the other. Hanagan was a man hunter, short and stern, and as solid as a rock. Kent was taller, leaner, but there was a willowy liteness about him that showed his strength.

They were standing in a hall of a New York building.

"What I mean, Kent," Hanagan amended. "We haven't the least shred of evidence to show that Dr. Kilgour

had anything to do with Marcia's disappearance. We're not even sure she came to his office or even that she knew him. All we've got to go on is his telephone number on a piece of paper that we found in her room."

"It was his telephone number, wasn't it?" Kent blazed.

"Yes."

"And when I called him on the phone he wouldn't even talk to me. Said he had never heard of such a person. If he was telling the truth why was his telephone number in her room?"

"I don't know," the detective admitted. "But if you go breakin' into his office in your present mood, you may get yourself handed over to the police. These doctors are damned touchy about professional confidences."

"Professional confidences he damned!" Kent blurted. "If he knows anything about Marcia, I'm going to find out." He shrugged the detective's hand from his shoulder, strode purposefully down the hall to the door marked Dr. Silas Kilgour—Physician. He yanked it open, and went in.

THE waiting room was empty except for a prim little receptionist, who smiled professionally up at him. "Good afternoon, sir. Did you wish to see Dr. Kilgour?"

"Yes," Kent answered bluntly. "Is he in?"

"Yes, but he is busy just at present. If you will have a seat he will see you in a few minutes."

"He'll see me right now," Kent answered, striding toward the inner door. He ignored the horrified wail of the receptionist that "Dr. Kilgour is busy on a diagnosis. You can't go in."

"The hell I can't!" he thought. For two days he had been searching for Marcia. Neither he nor Hanagan nor the police had been able to find even a trace

of her. She could not have vanished more completely if she had walked off the face of the earth.

Dr. Kilgour looked up from the X-ray picture he was studying. He had a long lean face and cold, expressionless eyes. "Who in the devil are you?" he snapped. "And what explanation do you have for breakin' into my office in this manner?"

"I'm Kent Wade," Kent answered. He watched Kilgour's face. It was a hard mask that showed no trace of any emotion. But when he gave his name, he saw the doctor's mask slip just a little. Did that mean anything, or didn't it?

"Oh," Dr. Kilgour replied. "You're the idiot who called me on the phone an hour or so ago. You demanded to know if I knew anything about some girl named Marcia Williams. I told you I didn't. What do you want, now?"

"I want to know if you're lying," Kent snapped. "That's why I came down here. So I could look you in the face while I asked you a few questions."

Dr. Kilgour had risen from his chair. His face had gone icy white with rage. He controlled himself with obvious effort.

"Look here, young man," he said from between clenched teeth. "I'm not accustomed to having my word doubted. Even if this girl had been a patient of mine, I am not required to reveal that fact to you or anyone else. The communication between a physician and his patient is privileged and not even the law can force a doctor to reveal it. But, as a matter of fact, I never even heard of this girl."

"Then how does it happen that your telephone number was found in her apartment?"

"Was it?" Dr. Kilgour echoed.

"It certainly was. How do you explain it?"

Kilgour hesitated, sought for words, then snapped, "I don't explain it. Possibly she had planned to call me for an appointment and never had the opportunity to make the call. She might have made a mistake in jotting down a number. There are a dozen different rational explanations."

"I think you're lying," Kent interrupted. "You're covering something up, hiding something. What are you trying to hide, Dr. Kilgour?"

Again the physician's face had whitened with rage. For a second Kent thought the doctor was going to leap at him. But Kilgour controlled himself. He didn't try to use his fists. Instead he picked up the telephone.

"Get me police headquarters," he spoke into the instrument. He turned to Kent. "Young man, if you don't leave this office instantly, I'm going to have you arrested."

"Oh, all right," Kent answered. "You don't have to call the police. I'll go."

HANAGAN was waiting for him in the lobby. The detective drew the youthful chemist to one side.

"Did you find out anything?"

"No," Kent answered bitterly. "He might be lying—"

"He is lying!" Hanagan interrupted.

"What?" Kent jerked out. The detective's quiet statement surprised and jarred him. "How do you know he is?" he snapped.

"I took Marcia's picture and showed it to the elevator operators, reasoning that anybody who had once seen a girl as good looking as she is would remember her. It worked. One of the elevator operators remembered her. He said she had been in the building six or seven times within the last month, seeing a doctor—"

"Six or seven times!" Kent gasped. "But good heavens, if she were seeing a

doctor she would surely tell me about it. And she never once mentioned such a thing—"

"Was there anything wrong with her?" Hanagan asked. "Was she sick, or anything?"

"Not—not to my knowledge. She said nothing about it. But—" He tried to think. A cold chill struck him. During the past few months he had noticed a change in Marcia. She had seemed graver, less gay and no longer carefree. She had complained frequently of headaches and several times he had noticed lines of pain on her face. Once he had asked her if she were ill, but she had laughed and said she was in perfect health.

But she had been seeing a doctor! Why? And why hadn't she told Kent about it?

"When was the last time this elevator operator saw her?" Kent snapped.

"I'm coming to that. The last time he saw her was two days ago, in the afternoon."

"The day she disappeared!"

"Yes. He said he took her up and brought her back down."

The statement smashed Kent's swiftly forming suspicions. Marcia had been here, in this building. But she had left.

"Was she alone when she came down?"

"Yes," Hanagan answered. "There was no one with her. She spent about thirty minutes in the building, and when she came down, the operator noticed her particularly. He said she looked like a walking ghost. Her face was white and her eyes were glassy. She stumbled when she got in the elevator. The operator thought she had been drugged."

Drugged! The word was a smashing gong ringing in Kent's mind. Supposing Marcia had been drugged. What had happened to her after she left this build-

ing? Had she fallen into the clutches of some ring of kidnappers?

The thought was agony. Kent tried to tell himself that such things simply couldn't happen. But they did happen. Marcia was gone.

"The operator watched her when she got off the elevator on her way in," Hanagan said grimly. "He said she went directly to Dr. Kilgour's office."

"To Kilgour's office!" Kent gasped. "Then that damned doctor was lying to me." He swung on his heel. "I'm going up and talk to him again and this time he won't put me off so easily."

"I'm going with you," said Hanagan. "There are some questions I want to ask that doctor myself."

I WANT to see Dr. Kilgour," Kent rasped as they swung into the physician's office.

The prim receptionist fluttered agitated hands at them. "But Dr. Kilgour just left," she wheezed. "He went out immediately after you were here the first time."

"Where in the hell—" Kent started to explode. Hanagan's fingers digging into his shoulder silenced him.

"It is essential that we get in touch with Dr. Kilgour immediately," said Hanagan suavely. "Can you tell us where we can locate him?"

His smoothness reassured the receptionist. Hanagan was an experienced man-hunter. When force was necessary, he knew how to use it. But when a polite questioning smile was indicated as the proper approach, he knew how to smile.

The receptionist smiled back. "Dr. Kilgour didn't say where he was going. There is a possibility, however, that he went to his sanitarium."

"Ah, yes, his sanitarium," Hanagan said. "I've often heard him mention it. Do you think we could locate him

there?"

"Would you like to call the sanitarium?" the girl asked, indicating the telephone.

"No," Hanagan answered. "We have to see him personally. Since we are in a hurry, I was going to ask you the quickest route to the sanitarium."

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed." Hanagan's smile had got in its good work. "Your quickest route is Riverside Drive. The sanitarium is north on the Hudson River." She gave minute directions for reaching it.

"Thank you," Hanagan said. "On second thought, we might be able to reach the doctor before he leaves. Where does he keep his car?"

"At the garage just around the corner," the girl answered. "If you hurry you might be able to reach him there."

"We'll hurry, all right!" Hanagan answered. "Come on, Kent."

At the garage, a lanky attendant said: "Nope. Doc's car ain't here. He came and got it. Hell of a hurry he was in, too. How long since he left? Not over five minutes, mister."

"Five minutes too late," Kent groaned. "He's given us the slip."

"We'll take my car and head for his sanitarium," Hanagan said. "We don't know we can find him there, but it's our only hope."

Hanagan drove like a madman. And as he drove, he told Kent, in short, clipped sentences the rumors he had heard about an incredible physician called Dr. Destiny.

CHAPTER II

Mysterious Disappearances

NOBODY knows anything about this Dr. Destiny," Hanagan said bluntly. "Nobody knows whether he even exists or not. Nobody has ever

seen him, or if they have, they haven't lived to tell it. What he looks like, who he is, where he came from—nobody knows. But this much is known: the hums are clearing out of this town."

"Bums?" Kent queried.

"Yeah, bums. The panhandlers, dead-beats, cokey Joes. The down-and-outers, the misfits, the flop-house lads. Oh, they haven't all gone; but a lot of them have. Why? Because they're scared. They've been disappearing right and left."

"Disappearing? How?" Kent demanded.

"Off park benches, out of doorways, from alleys. Where they've gone, nobody knows. You see, when a hum turns up missing, the other hums don't go to the police about it. The cops would laugh at them."

"But I've got some friends in that strata of society. They tell me what's happening. And they're talking about somebody that calls himself Dr. Destiny. They say that either he, or a strong-arm squad taking orders from him, has been going around the streets late at night. Whenever they find somebody asleep on a park bench, they slug him, give him a shot in the arm, dump him in a car and haul him off."

Kent swallowed his fear. He tried to disregard the obvious implication in Hanagan's words. "It's incredihle," he said. "Why should anybody be kidnapping those miserable, unfortunate wretches?"

"That's what the hums want to know," the detective answered. "They say that after their friends have disappeared, they sometimes come back, three or four of them together, and hunt for other victims. *But the ones who come back walk like dead men, act like dead men.* They don't recognize their comrades, their heads loll on their shoulders, and their eyes look like the eyes

of a corpse. They're neither dead nor alive, and these living dead men seem to be under the command of some unseen master, who tells them exactly what to do."

In spite of himself, Kent shivered. The picture the detective drew was too horrible to be believed. Yet he knew Hanagan. The detective never indulged in wild talk.

"Do—do you think," he said, "that there is a connection between Marcia's disappearance and the vanishing of these unfortunate persons?"

Hanagan's face was grim as death. But he tried to lie. One swift glance out of the corner of his eyes at the pale-faced youthful chemist sitting beside him, and the detective lied. "Not a chance, Kent," he said.

"Then why are we going to Dr. Kilgour's sanitarium, why are you driving like a fool trying to get there, if you don't believe that this Dr. Destiny has somehow kidnapped Marcia? You're lying; it's written on your face."

"Yes," the detective admitted. "I'm lying. I'm desperately afraid that Dr. Destiny, Dr. Kilgour, and Marcia are mixed up together. And I keep remembering what that elevator operator said about her—that she looked like she was drugged when she came out of Kilgour's office. Kilgour knows we're on his trail. If he's got her up at his sanitarium, drugged, he's heading up there to get her out of the way. That's why I'm driving like a fool. I want to get there before he does."

HE gunned the car through a red light, ignoring the protesting horns and squealing brakes of other cars. Kent gritted his teeth. They were far exceeding the legal speed limit, but under his breath he kept urging Hanagan to drive faster. This was a race with death, or with a fate more

hideous than death, if he read aright those grim pictures Hanagan had created of the kidnapping of the bums.

The car roared out Riverside Drive. Kent kept close watch for Kilgour's car but never saw it. The physician might be ahead or behind them. There was no way of knowing. The only thing to do was drive. Hanagan drove. They were at the outskirts of the city when night fell.

Then the storm struck them.

Jagged tongues of lightning forked down to earth. The thunder roared and the echoes came back from the palisades of the Hudson. Rain poured down in driving sheets.

Hanagan cursed. "Gotta slow down," he said. "Can't see. Might go off the road. We turn to the right somewhere within the next ten miles, up a narrow side road. You watch for it. Can't afford to miss it."

But, in spite of Kent's watchfulness, they did miss the narrow side road that led upward to the sanitarium. The receptionist had described it. It was really little more than a lane. It turned sharply around the base of a hill. Kent strained his eyes looking for it. The speedometer showed they had covered more than ten miles.

"I missed it," Kent said. "We've got to turn back." He was sick at the thought of the delay.

Under his breath, Hanagan cursed, and swung the car around. This time they found the right road. The rain had ceased. The storm had passed, leaving a wet earth behind it. They found the sanitarium. It looked like a converted farmhouse, a two-story frame structure. Behind it was a cluster of small buildings.

They had found the sanitarium but the storm and the missed road had cost them over an hour.

The second floor of the house was

dark, but lights showed in two rooms of the first floor.

A black sedan, stained and mud-splashed, stood beside the house.

"That's Kilgour's car," Kent rasped. "He beat us here."

He didn't wait for the car to stop but flung open the door and leaped out into the darkness. He was running toward the house when Hanagan overtook him.

"Hold it, Kent," the detective rasped. "You can't go bursting in there like that. You might get your head shot off."

"Let me go. Marcia may be here. Do you understand? Marcia may be here."

"I understand," Hanagan said sympathetically. "But you may sign her death warrant if you go rushing into that house. We can help her best if we know what we're doing ourselves."

THAT Hanagan was giving him sound advice, Kent recognized. Hanagan had spent his life as a detective. He knew what to do. Swiftly he gave his orders.

"You go around to the right and I'll go around to the left. We'll meet back of the house and compare notes. That way, when we decide to act, we'll know what we're doing. Here's a flashlight. Don't use it unless you have to," Hanagan finished. He faded into the darkness, leaving Kent alone.

The house was surrounded by heavy clumps of shrubbery. There were no other houses near it. It was hidden from the road by the forest that surrounded it.

Until that moment Kent had not known that such primitive isolation could exist so near a metropolis like New York City. Back not many miles to the south was Manhattan, with a million lights burning in the sky. Here there was darkness, shadows, and isolation.

Kent started around the house, every sense alert. Drops of water dripped from the trees over his head. And then came another sound, a squashy splash that sent the blood pounding to his head. The splash of an unwary foot landing in a pool of water?

Kent stood stock still, listening, peering into the darkness. He heard nothing. The sound was not repeated. A clump of shrubbery moved and he concentrated his gaze on it. He did not dare use his light. It would call attention to him instantly. The shrubbery did not move again. He decided he had been mistaken.

He walked toward the house. There was a light in one room. He looked through the window, and saw no one. The room was plainly furnished. It seemed to be a library. He moved on to another window, a window that opened outward from the second lighted room.

His heart contracted at the sight.

Marcia was in that room. She was bare, in this sanitarium.

And something was terribly wrong with her. She had been gay and full of life; rosy-cheeked and bright-eyed. Now her cheeks were as pale as wax and her eyes looked dead. She was walking slowly back and forth, pacing the floor like a caged animal.

She looked drugged. More than that, she seemed to be *controlled*. Some impulse seemed to be pulling her toward the door of the room. She seemed to be trying to fight against the impulse. She would go to the door, and then back away from it, her face tortured with fear.

Kent didn't have a gun. He didn't have a weapon of any kind, except his fists. He didn't know what might be waiting for him inside that house. But Marcia was there.

There was a side door. It was locked.

Kent backed off and buried himself at it like a battering ram. The door crashed inward with explosive violence. He was off balance and he fell headlong into a dark hallway.

As he struggled to his feet a light flashed on. A man came out of a room. It was Dr. Kilgour. He had a gun in his hand, a heavy pistol that he was pointing straight at Kent.

"Who in the hell are you?" the physician barked. Kilgour seemed frightened. His cold, expressionless eyes were alive with startled fear. "Get your hands up," he snapped. "Quickly, before I put a bullet through you."

UNDER the pressure of the black muzzle of that gun, Kent obeyed. Inwardly, he was raging. He had lost his head again. Hanagan had advised caution, but the sight of Marcia had driven all thought of the detective's hard-earned wisdom out of his mind. He had tried to help her, but instead of helping her, he found himself looking into the muzzle of a gun. Now he was trapped, now both he and Marcia were at the mercy of this physician.

"Turn around," Kilgour rapped. Kent obeyed. He felt the doctor's fingers run smoothly over his body.

"No gun, eh?" the physician said. He seemed a little puzzled by the absence of a weapon. "All right, you can turn around. What are you doing here? Who are you?" Apparently Kilgour had not recognized Kent.

"You know damned good and well who I am," the youthful chemist blazed. "You know why I'm here, too. I want Marcia Welling. What have you been doing to her? Why have you brought her here?" Kent was raging. The sight of this wooden-faced cold physician and the thought of what he might have done to Marcia had made him almost berserk.

"Marcia Welling?" Kilgour blinked.

in feigned surprise. "Yes. Oh, yes." Recognition came into his eyes. "You're the man she was engaged to. You're the man who was in my office this afternoon. Now I recognize you."

The gun, centered on Kent's heart, sagged a little. It was no longer pointing directly at him. Kent saw it. The sight sent a surge of hope through him. He tensed himself to leap.

And the gun came up again. "Listen, young man—" the physician began.

"He's not used to guns," Kent thought quickly. "If I can distract his attention, he'll forget about the gun he's holding on me and let it drop again. But how can I distract him? How?"

Then an idea struck him, a way to hit Kilgour right between the eyes.

"I'm not listening to you any longer, *Dr. Destiny*," he rasped. "You've been getting away with murder, but now you've come to an accounting. This so-called sanitarium of yours is surrounded by police. We've got enough evidence to convict you of a kidnaping charge. You've come to the end of your rope. How do you like that, *Dr. Destiny*?"

Kent was gambling. He did not know that Kilgour was Dr. Destiny. He did not know that such a person as Dr. Destiny actually existed.

The effect of the name on the physician was miraculous. His cold, utterly impersonal eyes became alive with fearful animation. His face whitened. His jaw dropped.

"Where—where did you hear that name?" he whispered from suddenly bloodless lips.

Kent didn't answer. He acted. The physician had completely forgotten that he had a gun in his hand. Kent's fist came up in a flashing blow that had every ounce of his strength behind it. It struck the doctor cleanly on the button. It was a knockout punch, one of

those smashing drives that carries oblivion with it.

Kilgour's head snapped back. His body slammed against the wall, the gun dropping from nerveless fingers. The physician slid to the floor—out.

Kent grabbed the gun.

He ran to the door through which he had entered.

"Hanagan!" he yelled. "Come here! I've got him."

There was no answer.

HE turned, raced back toward the room where Marcia was held prisoner. It was on the left, at the middle of the narrow hallway. Before he got to it, he knew that something was wrong.

The door was open.

The room was empty.

"Marcia!" he called.

There was no answer.

Suddenly frantic, he called her name again. Echoes laughed back at him from the silent house.

Dr. Kilgour, still out, lay in the hall in plain sight. Marcia could not have come past them. But another narrow hall led toward the back of the house. She could have gone that way. But had she! She had certainly heard him and Kilgour talking. She knew his voice. She would not have run away. But she was gone.

She must have been taken away. There must have been—must still be—someone else in the house.

And why didn't Hanagan turn up?

Grimly, Kilgour's gun in one hand, flashlight in the other, Kent went from room to room. That he was risking his life, he well knew. From any of those dark rooms death might leap at him. Behind any closed door death might be lurking.

He kicked the doors open, shot his flashlight beam into each room. The

house was silent. Utterly silent. His footsteps were loud in the barren halls. There was no other sound.

He went to the second floor. There were four bedrooms and a bath up here. Each bedroom was plainly but comfortably furnished. Three of the bedrooms were undisturbed. The fourth had been used. One of the beds had been slept in. There was clothing in the room. Women's clothes. There were two bags in the corner, bags that he instantly recognized. Marcia's bags.

But Marcia was gone. She was not in the house. No one was in the house. It was empty.

Kent went downstairs. Kilgour had not regained consciousness. He thought of reviving the physician and shaking the truth out of him, but changed his mind. Instead he went outside.

"Hanagan!"

No answer.

It was then that Kent knew that something was terribly wrong. Not only had Marcia disappeared but something had happened to Hanagan. Then he recalled the squashy foot-step that he had thought he had heard when he first approached the house. He remembered how the clump of shrubbery had moved, as if some ghastly watcher peered at him from the tangle.

He went around the house toward the back, his flashlight beam poking everywhere. He was convinced that something had lurked outside this house, possibly still lurked there.

But he saw nothing—until he got to the back door of the house.

There his flashlight beam, directed down on the ground, revealed the deep impression of high heeled shoes in the soft ground. A woman had come out of the back door of the house.

It could only have been Marcia.

Her heels had sunk deeply into the rain-softened earth. She had come out

the back door, leaped from the porch, and ignoring the walk, had gone running away into the night. *Running away.*

And she had gone of her own accord. There were no other footprints near. She had gone alone—into the night. It was impossible to tell whether she had thought she was fleeing from deadly danger or was running to the arms of some fancied protector.

Hanagan was gone. Marcia had run into the night.

What was happening here?

Like a hound on the trail, Kent set off—following Marcia's footprints.

CHAPTER III

Doctor Destiny's Power

HE thought at first that the footprints would lead him toward the cluster of buildings at the rear, but they veered sharply around them.

The sanitarium was set in a little clearing. Forests, stretching away for miles, came up to it on three sides. Marcia had run to the forest. Kent followed. Heedless of the danger, he called her name. There was no answer.

As Kent plunged deeper into the forest, he began to realize that he was being followed. Behind him a stick snapped soggily. He flashed his light toward the sound, but saw nothing. Yet he knew he hadn't been mistaken. Someone—or *something*—was following him. He turned off his light, and waited, listening. Nothing. With every passing second, Marcia was getting farther and farther away from him. He had to find her. He turned on the light and went on.

Before he had gone another hundred yards, he knew that he was not only being followed, but that someone was moving parallel with his course on both

the right and the left. He was hemmed in from three sides. Yet, use his light as he would, he could see no one.

Then his light caught a glint of white up ahead and he saw something that made him momentarily forget the weird watchers so quietly closing in on him.

Marcia! She was standing in a little open space.

Sharply calling her name, he ran toward her. He had found her! That was all that mattered. Now that he had found her he could fight his way out of this forest, if necessity demanded. He had a gun. He wouldn't hesitate to use it—to protect Marcia.

She saw him coming, heard him call, turned toward the sound. She knew his voice. But she didn't try to come toward him. She didn't seem frightened. She just stood—and waited.

"Marcia! It's Kent. Oh, my dear, what has happened to you—" He stopped, appalled. She didn't seem to know him. She merely glanced at him, incuriously, then turned away. He saw her eyes. They were blank, lifeless, dead. Her face was absolutely expressionless.

He seized her, shook her gently, tried to talk to her.

She didn't seem to realize he was touching her.

"Oh, God!" Kent thought. She was drugged. That was the explanation of her behavior. That was the clue to the explanation of all her actions. She had been drugged in Kilgour's office, perhaps given a hypodermic under the impression that some simple blood test was being made.

An instant later Kent knew how wrong he was. She wasn't drugged. Perhaps she was slightly under the influence of some drug, but more than that, she was *controlled*. She was in the grip of some incredible power.

She utterly ignored him. She began

to speak, but she wasn't talking to Kent. *She was talking to someone else, someone who wasn't present.*

"Yes, Dr. Destiny," she said. "Yes. Yes. I hear you. I'm so confused, but I understand you. Yes, I'm coming."

With a strength that was surprising, she jerked out of his arms and fled.

Doctor Destiny! She had spoken to Doctor Destiny! She was going to him. He had her in his power. He was real. He existed.

KENT was so surprised that, for an instant, he made no attempt to overtake Marcia. And when he did start—something loomed up out of the night in front of him.

He jerked to a halt, his light full on this creature, his gun ready. It was a man or it *had* been a man. It was dressed in an odd jacket. It was hatless, its face was frozen and set. It was advancing straight toward him.

"Halt!" Kent snapped. "Halt or I'll shoot."

A sound, coming from the right, jerked his attention away. He shot the light in that direction.

Another man was coming toward him, a man with vacant face and staring, soulless eyes. He walked—Kent remembered Hanagan's description—like a living dead man!

All around him the rustle of moving feet sounded. He swung his light in a circle.

The forest was alive with the creatures. He counted eight of them. They were converging on him from all directions. Their steady approach meant only one thing: they wanted him. He was surrounded on all sides. Flight was out of the question. He would have to fight.

"I'll shoot," he said sharply. "I mean it."

They kept coming. They were al-

most on him.

He pulled the trigger of the gun.

The hammer fell with a sharp click. The cartridge didn't explode.

He yanked the trigger again, thinking that possibly the first cartridge had merely missed fire. Again the hammer fell with a click.

Holding the pistol in front of the light, he saw in an instant what was wrong. There were no cartridges in the chambers.

Kilgour had held him up with an empty gun.

His attackers were almost on him. Cursing, he flung the gun at the nearest one. It struck the man full in the face but he merely shook his head as though brushing away a fly. He kept coming. Arms outstretched, eyes fixed with a terrible, if vacant, intensity on Kent, he kept coming.

Kent met them with flashing fists. The light he had dropped on the ground gave a weak illumination, enough to see to swing his fists. His right, driving forward with all the power of his body behind it, took the nearest man full on the point of the jaw. It had as much power as the blow that had knocked out Kilgour. The man merely staggered. He didn't fall. He didn't even grunt. He didn't seem to know that he had been hit. Like a man who is already dead, and hence cannot be killed, he kept coming. Now he was swinging his own fists. All of them were reaching out toward Kent, shoving brutal heavy fists straight from their shoulders toward him.

He tried to fight back. A fist hit him on the jaw. Another struck him on the side of the head. A third hit the back of his neck.

Red flashes of agonizing pain shot through him. He sagged to the ground. Weakly he flung his arms around the knees of the man nearest him, tried to

lift his attacker off the ground. Pummeling fists struck him, smashed him to the ground. A wave of dirty, smelly bodies fell on him. Consciousness exploded in a flood of bursting light.

HE awakened in darkness. For a long time he was not certain he was awake. He thought he heard, coming from the distance, a bellowed chant of male voices, but he was not certain that the roaring did not come from his own ears. He was too weak to move. He wondered if he had been drugged. He was not conscious of any pain, but his body was weak—weak—weak.

Something had happened to him. He knew that much. But he could not see that it mattered. He was in trouble, but in the dim darkness of his mind was the knowledge that Hanagan would be along soon and get him out of his difficulty. There was solid comfort in that thought. He had a world of confidence in the ability of that burly detective. Hanagan would turn up, with the police, or the militia, or maybe the marines, and hell would pop. He could rely on Hanagan.

Vaguely he could hear that chant rising and falling in the distance but as yet his mind was not clear enough to attach any significance to the sound. There were rustles and groans near him but he did not attach any significance to them either. His mind was dazed. He was only half conscious, and when he saw the light approaching in the distance, coming down a corridor toward him, he was barely able to focus his gaze on it. As it came nearer his mind seemed to clear.

Three men were walking down the corridor. The light they carried clearly revealed them. Vacant-faced, dead-eyed, they marched in regular step, like automatons striding purposefully through hell.

It was the man in the center who jarred Kent to full consciousness. Clad in some sort of a uniform, marching in regular step with the other two, eyes fixed to the front and no expression on his face was—Hanagan!

The three came marching past. Kent realized that he was seeing them through a grill made of iron bars. He called sharply to Hanagan. The detective never so much as indicated that he had heard his own name. He didn't glance around, he gave no sign that he had heard. His face didn't change.

Keeping regular step with the other two, he went striding by, disappeared in the direction of the swelling chant.

The detective had been captured. Whatever had been done to the others had been done to him. He was a soulless automaton. With that fact, Kent's hope that the detective would find and rescue him vanished. If he escaped at all, if he rescued Marcia, it would have to be by his own efforts.

"Friends of yours?" a voice spoke from the darkness near him.

Kent recoiled. There was no light. He couldn't see his hand before his face. "Who—who are you?" he whispered.

"I'm Dan," the same voice answered. "And this is the Deacon and Cincy Slim is asleep."

"I'm not asleep," another voice denied.

"Glad to meet you, brother," said the Deacon. "I could wish that our meeting had been under more auspicious circumstances but in this world we cannot always have what we prefer."

"Don't mind the Deacon," Dan said. "He swallowed the dictionary when he was a kid, and then he turned to straight alcohol to help him digest it."

Kent sighed in relief. He could not see the men but from the voices he knew who these men were. Bums. Men who

had been picked up off the streets and brought here.

"Where am I?" he demanded.

"You are probably more familiar with your whereabouts than we are," the Deacon answered. "All I know is that I went to sleep on a park bench and awakened in this very unpleasant spot. This much we know: we are underground. This hole in which we are held prisoners is cut out of solid rock. We have deduced that there is a tremendous system of connecting caverns here. But where this place is located, we unfortunately are unable to say."

Underground! A city of the dead would naturally be under the surface of the earth.

"This is the hangout of Dr. Destiny," Dan said.

THEY told him what they knew. It was precious little. There were hundreds of soulless, mindless creatures who had once been men, in the caverns. The man who called himself Dr. Destiny was their master. He absolutely controlled them. But who Dr. Destiny was they did not know. They had never seen him. They would not see him until their turn to be taken from their prison and have their minds ruthlessly blotted out.

They seemed almost resigned to their fate. Life had not treated them kindly and whatever Dr. Destiny did with them was not very important. All spirit and all hope had long since been whipped out of them.

They told Kent that he had been at least one and possibly two days unconscious all the time. He groaned when he heard this. What couldn't have happened in two days—to Marcia!

"Our number's been up a long time now, but something seems to have happened to their schedule, for they've quit coming to us," Cincy Slim volunteered.

"Either that, or they have forgotten all about us," he added hopelessly.

"It's that him they brought in," said Dan. "Old Doc Destiny has been working on her. That's what's kept him from getting around to us."

"Bim?" Kent gasped.

"Yeah. Girl in your language. They brought her right past us here. He's king of this world and we figure he's planning on making her queen."

The master of the dead was seeking a queen to rule with him over his ghastly hordes!

Kent realized all too well who that queen was to be.

"I've got to get out of here," he snarled.

"Yeah?" said Cincy Slim apathetically. "Well, huddy, you got our sympathies but them hars is made out of iron. You gonna gnaw through them with your teeth or have you got a cutting torch in your hip pocket?"

"I'll find a way," he rasped. He began feeling the grill with his hands, seeking a weak place, seeking an opening, a way to escape. As he feverishly sought a way out of the cell, the chant that had been throbbing in the distance boomed to thunderous heights. He could distinguish the words.

"All power—and all glory—and all honor—to the master—of the dead."

He shook the bars in his bare hands, trying to tear them from their holds.

"There's a shoulder back here," the Deacon suggested. "It's too big for one man to lift, but if all four of us took hold, we might be able to knock those bars down with it."

CHAPTER IV

A King—And a Queen!

THE chunk of rock must have weighed over three hundred pounds.

When it hit, something had to give. It made an infernal racket, and Kent's heart was up in his mouth for fear someone would hear the pounding and come to see what it was all about. But no one came. And at the third blow, an iron bar gave way, leaving an opening big enough to squeeze through.

"I gather," the Deacon panted, "that you must be interested in—ah—the young lady."

"Interested is no word for it," Kent answered. He explained the situation to them.

"In that case," the Deacon said, "I suggest we go along with you. I admit my first thought, when I discovered we had a chance to escape, was to take full advantage of the opportunity offered. But you need help, if you are going to rescue the young lady. What do you say, lads? Shall we lend our efforts to the cause?"

The other two growled assent.

"Then lead away," the Deacon said. "We will follow."

"I'll thank you later," Kent answered. He could easily guess the hopeless odds he was facing and he was more than grateful for their offers to help.

The corridor made an abrupt turn, and around that turn, the darkness ended. The tunnel was illuminated by ordinary electric light bulbs. "The devil!" said Cincy Slim. "They must have their own generating plant."

"Our comrade was once an electrician," the Deacon observed.

There was no one in sight. The chant was louder now, pouring its thunderous volume like a river of sound down the corridor. They slid down the tunnel, cautiously now, for the light revealed them clearly.

From the seemingly solid stone wall an opening suddenly yawned. It was a door, cunningly fitted into the stone so as not to be easily visible. A man

walked from it.

Kent tensed himself to leap. But the man ignored them. His blank face was turned toward them, but he gave no indication that he saw them. He went striding down the corridor ahead of them.

The Deacon mopped his brow.

But Cincy Slim was excited. "Did you see what was in that room he came out of? A power plant. Diesels and generators. If we could get in there and cut the switches, we could throw the whole place into darkness."

Kent considered the matter. And decided against it. Hanagan's advice came back to him forcefully. "Know what you're doing before you do it."

"If we wreck the plant, we advertise our presence," he said. "They don't seem to know we've escaped. There are a lot of things we need to know before we try anything."

"Sound advice, young man," the Deacon droned.

At the next turn of the corridor, the rock walls opened up ahead of them, revealing an immense circular amphitheater. It dropped down below them in a semicircle of descending tiers.

It was from this amphitheater that the chant was coming. The roaring volume of sound came from the men seated here. There were hundreds of them. They squatted on the stone ledges, every eye fixed on the small platform set against the opposite wall.

Kent, peering around the corner, took only one glance at the person seated on that platform, and jerked back. Beside him he heard the Deacon gasp and mutter something under his breath.

"It's the devil himself, come alive up out of hell," Dan whispered in nervous awe.

KEKT, even in his wildest nightmares, had never imagined such a

creature. He was a man all right; or he had been a man, but he was terribly out of proportion. A thin, wizened body topped a towering, bulging, bulbous head. That head was three times as big as the head of an ordinary man. It was a soft spongy mass, white and hairless. Circling it, and supported on a slender rod of metal rising from the arm of the chair in which this monstrosity was seated, was a band of metal. What purpose it served, Kent could not guess, though later he learned that horrible secret.

Dr. Destiny was seated on his throne. Under his hands, on the arms of the heavy chair in which he was seated, were row after row of push buttons. Standing beside him, facing the front, were four vacant-faced staring men—the living dead.

The chant died into silence.

From a hidden loudspeaker the monstrosity's voice issued.

"Who am I?"

Swelling in sonorous volume, like some unholy catechism, the chorus roared an answer.

"You are our Master."

Dr. Destiny smiled. "And who are you?"

"We are the dead," the answer came.

"And what is the law?"

"Obey the will of our master."

"And what is the will of your master?"

"To go forth from his hiding place and rule over the land." The hull chorus swelled to a roaring torrent of sound. "He shall rule over the land and the air and the sea."

"And when shall his rule start?"

"Soon—soon—soon!" The words boomed out.

"Oh, God!" Kent gasped. His blood was running cold. Now, for the first time, he saw the full significance of all that had gone before. That horrid mon-

strosity, seated on a throne, was an egomaniac, but he was an egomaniac who possessed a tremendous knowledge, a vast and terrible power. He had absolute control over the men facing him. They were slaves, worse than slaves. They had neither mind nor will of their own. What had been done to them only their master knew; but they had been robbed of all their normal human quantities and made into mindless automata.

And Dr. Destiny was planning to extend his rule. He was looking for new worlds to conquer, dreaming evilly of conquest. That his dream had an excellent chance of succeeding Kent instantly realized. He could not begin to guess the hidden power that Dr. Destiny possessed, but he could guess how tremendously vast it must be. There were at least two hundred men in the cavern. He controlled them perfectly. If he could control that many, he could control thousands as easily, possibly millions.

Millions of slaves rising up in an unsuspecting country, slaves who had no fear of their lives, whose only thought was to obey the will of their master. There would be no fighting them.

"And who shall rule beside the master?" the hidden speaker questioned.

"The Queen," the booming answer came. "The Queen shall rule beside the master."

"Bring in the Queen."

At the order a door in the rock wall at the bottom of the amphitheater rolled back. Out of it came two slaves. They were pushing a wheel chair between them. And in that wheel chair, head swathed in bandages, pale and wan and frightened—was Marcia.

Only the Deacon's restraining arm kept Kent from leaping forward.

"I know how you feel," said the

Deacon sympathetically.

Kent was quivering all over. Marcia was here! Here! He fought down the impulse to try to go to her aid. He had tried before, and had lost. He wouldn't stand a chance against the throng in the cavern.

The two blank-faced slaves lifted her from her wheel chair, led her up the steps to the platform, turned her to face the semicircle.

"Behold your Queen," the speaker droned.

"We see the Queen. She shall rule beside the master," the chorus answered.

Marcia did not say a word. She seemed not to fully understand what was happening.

Ways to help her raced through Kent's mind, but all of them too fantastic for consideration. The only chance that he could see was to escape from the cavern and return with help. The police, armed with sub-machine guns would make short work of the slaves. It was the only solution he saw.

He whispered his decision to the others.

"You're right," the Deacon admitted. "We will certainly need aid to subjugate these rascals. Much as I hate making such a suggestion, this is unquestionably a matter for the police—the sooner the better."

"Come on, then," Kent said. "Let's get out of here."

He turned. And stopped, frozen with surprise.

The corridor behind them was filled with slaves. They had come up so quietly that neither Kent nor any of the others with him had heard them. Blank-faced, impassive, they stood blocking the only exit.

Kent and his three companions were trapped.

In the amphitheater behind them a

heavy silence had fallen. In that silence the loudspeaker was rasping:

"Bring the visitors forward. No doubt they wish to join us."

"That tricky devil!" Cincy Slim wheezed. "He knew we were here all the time. He was just playing with us."

"Bring them forward," the speaker husked again. "If they attempt to resist, strangle them."

They had no choice but to obey. Without weapons they could not hope to fight their way through the massed ranks facing them.

As they marched down the tiers of stone steps that led to the bottom of the amphitheater, the girl standing on the platform suddenly screamed. In response to a command from Dr. Destiny, a burly slave clamped a hand over her mouth.

THEY stood before the monstrosity who called himself Dr. Destiny. He stared down at them from beady, merciless eyes. Kent, seeing that monstrous head, could not help wondering if it was a mask. Was his head that large? Or was he wearing a plastic mask, so cleverly made that it looked like flesh, designed to give him a terrifying aspect? Did a normal man sit in that chair, a man with a warped but very cunning brain?

"Well," said Dr. Destiny suddenly. "How did you like our performance?"

No one answered.

"I, of course, was aware of your escape the instant it occurred," he continued. "Photo-electric cells give me views of everything that is happening in what I am pleased to call my kingdom. I can, moreover, by telepathic rapport, amplified through a radio transmitter and receiver of my own design, maintain constant control over all my men, no matter where they are or what they may be doing. I see what they see, hear

what they hear, and they respond to my commands. Naturally, when my subject came out of the generating room and saw you, I was advised of your presence."

He paused and his eyes bored into them.

"How do you like what you have seen of my kingdom?" he inquired.

He was playing with them, and Kent knew it. But he could not restrain himself. "It's horrible," he blurted out, choking over the words.

"That's unfortunate," said Dr. Destiny acidly. "Because, in a very short time, you are going to belong to it."

Marcia had heard this conversation. The slave still had his hand clamped over her mouth. Now she tore herself loose from him.

"No," she screamed. "No. You can do what you want with me, but let Kent go."

"Well!" said Dr. Destiny. "I was not aware of your infatuation for this young man. But it does not matter. An infatuation is merely an auto-induced hypnosis, and it can be easily removed."

"No," Marcia pleaded with him. "Please."

His eyes glinted. "Seize her!" he roughly commanded. "Stop this shrieking."

The slave obeyed him. He turned his attention again to the men below. His orders barked out. "Bring in the hypodermics. We will prepare these four men immediately. And seize them, so they can't struggle."

Kent had already tensed himself to leap. When the slave seized Marcia he was ready to leap. While he saw no weapons around the platform, he did not doubt that weapons were hidden there. It did not matter. All that mattered was that he have a chance to get his hands on that grinning monstrosity

leering down at him.

But as he started to hurl himself upward, strong, implacable hands grabbed him. He tried to struggle against them. They only squeezed him tighter. Arms circled his chest, another arm reached around him from the rear and clamped an elbow under his chin. His breath was cut off. Sweat popped out all over him. Desperately he tried to fight his way clear—and failed.

His senses were reeling, his head swimming. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw slaves entering, bearing strange surgical equipment. He did not need to be told what use would be made out of that equipment.

Dr. Destiny was going to make a slave out of him, a soulless, inhuman robot, like those hundreds who sat in the semicircle around him and stared unknowingly and uncaringly down at the tragedy being enacted before them.

THE thought drove him berserk. Suddenly he had the strength of a dozen men. Stooping, he jerked the slaves behind him over his shoulders, smashed with his fists at the jaw of another, kicked one away who was trying to grab his legs—and was free.

Free! If only for a moment, he was free. Long enough to leap upward and smash Dr. Destiny to a pulp.

But, as he tried to leap upward to the platform, a solid wave of slaves rolled over him, hore him to the stone floor, held him. In spite of his mad struggles, he could not move.

"Nice try," said Dr. Destiny, with false sympathy. "Too bad it failed."

Failed! The word was a bell tolling his doom. He had failed. There would never be another chance. He was doomed. And Marcia was doomed with him. Already he could see the slaves bending over him with long hypodermic needles ready to plunge into his flesh.

Then—the thunder of a gun shook the cavern. Sharp and spitefully, it roared, and the echoes came thudding back from the walls overhead.

A gun! A pistol. Kent could scarcely believe his ears. Here, in the hidden kingdom ruled by Dr. Destiny, someone was shooting a gun.

And the gun had been aimed at Dr. Destiny. The startled surprise that flashed over his face would have been ludicrous in other circumstances. His eyes jerked up, toward the upper tier of the amphitheater.

From the wall behind him chips of stone flew out where the bullet had struck. It had passed within inches of Dr. Destiny and had thudded against the wall behind him. It had missed.

But there might be another shot. Dr. Destiny knew another bullet might follow the first one. And the second slug might not miss. He was a perfect target there on his throne.

His hands raced like lightning over the push-buttons under his fingers.

Instantly the lights went out. In the flash of a second the whole amphitheater was plunged into darkness. With the falling of the darkness, there was an instant of utter silence. Then a man screamed. And another. And another. All over the cavern men were suddenly screaming.

The slaves who were holding Kent down released him. Whether in the confusion Dr. Destiny had lost control of them, or whether something else accounted for the fact that they were suddenly normal men, Kent did not know. But they acted exactly like men awaking from a horrible nightmare, and finding themselves in the darkness of a strange place, screamed in fear.

Above their screaming another voice rose. "Wade!" it shouted. "Kent Wade. Find Miss Welling and take her out of here. Quickly! Do you under-

stand!"

IT was an order that Kent did not need. He didn't even have time to wonder who was calling his name. It wasn't Hanagan's voice. Of that much he was certain.

"Kent!" Marcia called. "Here I am."

An instant later she was in his arms. "Have you got the girl?" the Deacon's voice inquired. "If you have, Dan and Slim are here beside me. We'll lead the way. And if I may venture to suggest it, we had best be out of this madhouse before the lights come on again."

How they fought their way to the top of the stone tiers Kent did not know. Up ahead of him he heard the thud of fists meeting yielding flesh and he knew that Deacon and his two pals were getting in some solid blows. They might be hums, but in an emergency they knew what to do. And they weren't afraid to do it.

They were at the top of the tiers, at the exit to the amphitheater.

The lights came on again.

Instantly the mad screaming, the shrill cries of men trying to run and not knowing where they were running, the pitiful pleading for light, ceased. The slaves froze. In whatever position they were when the lights came on, they remained in that position.

On the platform Dr. Destiny sat on his throne. His fingers were playing over the push-buttons. Desperation was on his face.

Swiftly, at his unvoiced command, four husky slaves leaped in front of him. They formed a living shield against any more bullets that might come smashing downward.

The loudspeaker rasped a command. "Seize those people. Under no circumstances permit them to escape."

Dr. Destiny was pointing directly at Kent.

CHAPTER V

Like Rats in a Trap

"I'LL play Horatius at the bridge," said the Deacon. "You run, and if I may venture the suggestion, run like the devil was after you, which he is."

Up from the amphitheater dozens of slaves were leaping toward them, racing to obey their master's will.

"What about you?" Kent challenged.

The Deacon was a bum. At one time in his life he must have been somebody. He still carried the marks of a well educated person. But now he was a bum, a nobody. "I'll do the best I can," he answered. On his bearded, dirty face was a quiet dignity.

Kent understood his meaning. "They'll kill you," he protested.

"They will kill all of us otherwise. This way you have a chance to escape. I'll hold them back as long as I can. Get moving now."

The Deacon was right. He raised ham-like fists and waded into the front rank of the advancing slaves.

"Come on," Dan advised. "Deacon don't mind dying. It's living he didn't like."

Kent was choking as he raced down the corridor toward freedom. Behind him, like Horatius at the bridge, a man whom he had thought a bum was offering up his life that others might have a chance to live. As they raced around a corner, he caught a glimpse of the Deacon swinging his fists, heard him shouting a wild battle cry. "Give 'em hell, Tigers."

A few minutes later they heard feet pounding behind them and they knew that the Tiger who had fought for them back there was no longer in the battle.

And dropping from the roof of the tunnel ahead of them was a solid slab of stone.

Evidently controlled by the push buttons under Dr. Destiny's fingers, it fell with a jarring, grinding thud, effectively blocking all escape in that direction.

From hidden loudspeakers ghoulish laughter sounded. Dr. Destiny was laughing at them. And the thud of the running feet of his soulless legions was becoming louder with every passing second.

Kent pounded with his fists against the stone. Bruised, battered knuckles were his only reward. The harrier was impenetrable.

"Looks like this is the payoff," said Dan calmly. Like the Deacon, Dan's face was bearded and dirty. His clothes hung in tatters and rags, his hair was stringy.

It was the payoff. They were caught like rats.

"Isn't there anything we can do?" Marcia whispered. "I'd rather die than go back to him. He's going to—do something to me that will make me have a head like his."

"Like that bulging monstrosity!" Kent gasped.

"Yes. I can't begin to explain it but he did that to himself. It was his way of increasing his mental ability. And he is going to do the same thing to me."

Kent realized that he was staring at the bandages on her head. The sight sickened him. Had Dr. Destiny already made preparations to begin the hideous treatment that would make her into the same kind of monstrosity that he was?

"No," said Marcia. "He hasn't—yet."

"But those bandages," Kent croaked.

"That's the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me," she answered, her eyes suddenly glowing. "That's why I have to escape, now."

Whatever her meaning was, she had no time to explain it. The thud of the

feet of the legions of the living dead was a growing thunder. And Cincy Slim was exclaiming,

"The door to the power plant! It was just about here. If we could find that door—"

Dan and Kent were instantly searching for it. They found it.

But they couldn't open it. It was either locked or barred.

"This is my business," said Dan. "Stand aside."

HE went to work. From the sole of his ragged shoes he produced a thin, flexible piece of steel and a length of springy wire. With these he began probing for the catch that held the door.

"He's a burglar!" Kent thought.

Dan had been a burglar. More, he had been a good burglar. Sweat dripped from his ragged beard as he probed, with gentle, sure fingers, for the catch that held the door shut.

"Get a move on, buddy," Cincy Slim urged.

Around a turn in the tunnel came the legions of Dr. Destiny. He was not with them, but he was controlling them.

Dan's face was glistening with sweat as he struggled with the door. "This is a tough baby," he gasped. "It's an electric lock. Got to short out—Ah—"

The latch clicked. The door swung open. They piled through it, and swung it shut behind them, slamming it in the faces of the advancing horde.

In this room two heavy generators, driven by throbbing Diesel engines, were humming. There were two men here, two slaves, taking care of the equipment.

"Only two!" said Cincy Slim contemptuously. "Come on, Dan. You take that one and I'll take this one."

Smack! Cincy Slim's fist landed.

Kent leaped to help them but saw that his aid was scarcely needed. Dan

and Slim might be bums, but they were damned efficient. In less than a minute the two slaves of Dr. Destiny were unconscious on the floor.

And from a loudspeaker in the room a voice was coming. "Yield immediately. I warn you that you can expect no mercy if you attempt to continue resistance."

Dr. Destiny knew where they were. It was his voice calling them to surrender.

"You can go to hell!" Kent snarled in reply.

"You said it, huddy," Cincy Slim grinned. "We ain't never whipped until we're dead."

"Resistance is useless," came the voice over the speaker. "If not for your sake, surrender for the sake of the girl."

"No, thank you," Marcia answered bitterly. "I would rather be dead."

"Very well," the speaker raged. "You will have to suffer the consequences."

In Dr. Destiny's voice were overtones of fear. Kent heard them, and wondered. Always before Dr. Destiny had been calm, aloof, supercilious. But now he was frantic.

"Release gas into the power room!" the speaker ordered briskly.

GAS! They might hold off the slaves of Dr. Destiny, but against gas there was no defense. It would come in strangling floods and they would try not to breathe but outraged nature would force them to suck air into their lungs and instead of air would come gas.

Cincy Slim shook his head. Dan shrugged. "Nice fight," he said. "While it lasted. Trouble was it didn't last long enough."

"We're not licked yet," said Kent grimly. He was lying and he knew it. He was a chemist. He knew what gas would do.

But there must be some way to escape! There must be some weakness somewhere in Dr. Destiny's underground fortress. Not even a man with the brain power that he must have could contrive a perfect defense. And he had sounded worried. Was he worried because he was afraid something was going wrong? What could go wrong?

The first time Kent knew there was gas already in the room was when he coughed.

Minutes left to live!

Kent was thinking frantically. And his mind kept going back to the disordered moment in the amphitheater when the lights had gone out. Dr. Destiny had obviously turned the lights out, by punching a button on the arm of his chair.

But when the lights had gone out, he had lost control over his slaves. Had he, in his frantic haste to turn out the lights, punched the wrong button? Had he accidentally turned off the power—

"Power!" Kent gasped. "He turned off the current accidentally. That means his control over his slaves must depend on electricity." He looked around him.

"These generators!" he shouted. "Here's where he generates his current. Slim! You used to be an electrician. Stop these generators. I don't know that it will save us but it's our only chance."

Slim was already leaping to the switches. Gas was swirling into the room. And over the speaker system another voice was booming, the same voice that had shouted to Kent when the lights were out in the amphitheater, the voice of the man who had fired the bullet at Dr. Destiny.

"Switch off the current," the voice said. "He won't be able to—"

The voice stopped. Over the speaker there came a sudden scream of rage.

It was Dr. Destiny screaming in

murderous anger.

Slim jerked the switches. The lights went out. And from the corridor outside there came, after a moment's silence, the same kind of mad screaming that had sounded in the amphitheater when the slaves of Dr. Destiny were suddenly and unintentionally released from his control. The legions of the living dead had been released. And they were running mad.

"That does it," said Kent grimly, in the darkness. "But we've got to get out of here. Gas is still coming into this room. And there is enough here already to kill us if we keep on breathing it."

In the darkness they groped their way to the door, pushed through it.

"What I want to know," said Dan, "is who that guy was who took a shot at Dr. Destiny and then told us to cut the generators."

Kent was wondering about the same thing.

CHAPTER VI

Doctor Destiny Vanishes

"**T**HERE goes Dr. Destiny!" Dan shouted.

They were in the corridors. They had taken flashlights from the slaves of Dr. Destiny. Many of the slaves had been tramped to death in the mad flight that had ensued when they had suddenly awakened. Others were groping feebly in the darkness, dazedly trying to decide what had happened to them. They had no knowledge of anything they had done in the caverns. When they were released their memories went back to the last thing they had done before they were captured, with the result that their individual confusion had resulted in hopeless panic.

Down the corridor ahead of them Dr. Destiny was fleeing. There was no

mistaking that hulbois head.

"Catch him," Kent ordered. "We'll see how he likes a taste of his own medicine."

Glancing back over his shoulder, Dr. Destiny saw them coming. In that single glance they saw that his face was wrinkled with murderous rage. He screamed at them, and ran faster.

"We can't let him get away," Kent raged.

But Dr. Destiny knew what would happen to him if they caught him. He also knew his own kingdom. He raced down a straight corridor, stopped suddenly, pushed at the wall. A door opened. He slipped through it, and slammed it in their faces.

From the other side his raging laughter came to them. Then there was silence.

"He may have a secret passage that will enable him to get out of here," Kent snarled. "Dan, get busy on that lock."

But Dan was already hard at work. With spring and wire he was probing into the slit between the door and the fac-ing. Kent urged him to work faster.

"I can't work any faster," Dan panted. "This takes time."

The silence on the other side of the door was ominous. What was Dr. Destiny doing there? Was he planning some fiendish trap for them which they would fall into if they opened this door? Or did this room lead to some secret pas-sageway that would permit him to escape? Or—worst thought of all—did that room house another generating plant that would enable him to gain control of his slaves?

"Hurry," Kent begged.

"I've got it," Dan answered.

The door swung open.

The room on which it opened was dark.

Kent turned his light into the cavern. He was looking for traps. He didn't

see any. Nor did he see Dr. Destiny. Instead he saw—a man lying on the floor.

He flung his flashlight on the man's face.

IT was Dr. Kilgour.

No one else was in the room. It was barren—just four walls of rock.

"All right, Dr. Destiny," said Kent bitterly. "You can quit playing possum. We've got you at last."

The physician did not move. Kent bent over him. There was an angry bruise on his forehead.

"If you think you can take off that disguise and destroy it and hit yourself on the head and pretend to be somebody else, you're badly mistaken," Kent said. "Quit pretending, Dr. Destiny. You're caught and you know it." He shook the man roughly.

"You're wrong, Kent," said Marcia. "That isn't Dr. Destiny. I saw him and I know Dr. Kilgour isn't he."

"But there is no other way out of this room," Kent insisted. Dan and Cincy Slim were already pounding on the walls. They seemed to be solid stone. "We saw Dr. Destiny enter here. When we get in we find Dr. Kilgour. As I see it, this is what happened. Dr. Kilgour had a plastic mask made. When he came in here, he destroyed it."

But the girl was stubborn. "I know Dr. Kilgour isn't Dr. Destiny," she insisted. "In the first place, I saw Dr. Destiny. I talked to him, was with him for hours. I would know if he was wearing a plastic mask. And in the second place, I was facing the back of the amphitheater when the lights went out. I saw the man who fired that shot. It was Dr. Kilgour. It was he who called to us over the loudspeaker and told us to stop the generators. I recognized his voice."

Kent's mind was reeling. There was conviction in Marcia's voice. She knew what she was talking about.

"But where did Dr. Destiny go?" he whispered bewilderedly.

It was a question that was destined to stump everybody. Dr. Destiny had entered a room cut out of solid stone. When they forced the door, he was gone. There was no obvious exits to the room. The walls seemed to be solid. Yet he was gone.

Nor did subsequent investigation disclose an answer to that problem. Later, drills were brought and driven for several feet into the stone walls. They disclosed no openings.

DR. KILGOUR, when he regained consciousness, was able to answer some of the questions. "I was hiding here," the pale physician said. "When he entered, he slugged me. What happened after that I don't know. I can't even begin to suggest how he escaped, or if he did escape. There is a possibility that he destroyed himself completely, by some process of combustion with which we are unfamiliar. There is the possibility that he escaped. Which is correct I do not know."

"You know a damned sight more than you're telling," Kent blazed.

"Yes," the physician answered sadly. "I know a lot about Dr. Destiny. I know who he was, for one thing." He paused and his faded, impersonal eyes went around the little group.

"He was my brother," Dr. Kilgour said. "I provided a home for him in the buildings at the rear of my sanitarium. I, and a competent body of psychologists, were of the opinion that he was insane. How wrong we were, I now know. He was an egomaniac, but he was certainly sane—supernally sane."

"He had discovered a hormone secretion that governed the growth of the

brain tissue and the brain case. He injected this hormone into his own body. The result was that his brain began to increase in size—and his mental power also. Without my knowledge, he became the greatest intelligence that has ever lived.

"I was at my office all day and consequently knew nothing of his activities. But for years he must have been planning and plotting. How he secured his first slaves, I don't know. Perhaps he captured stragglers in the neighborhood. He used them to secure others.

"Then, working in complete secrecy, he began to construct this system of caverns. He enlarged natural caves already existing in the limestone strata underlying the hill on which my sanitarium rests, his slaves doing the actual work. He had absolutely rigid control over them.

"You may recall that hand circling his head. It was held in place by a narrow rod rising from the arm of his throne chair. That hand collected the thought currents from his own brain. These currents were then amplified tremendously by a radio transmitter and were hurled out to the minds of his slaves, who had already been prepared by a drug injection.

"That was the only weakness in his whole kingdom. If the power failed, or was cut off, he lost control of his men. If his radio set failed to function, the result was the same. Frankly, when I fired at him, I was really trying to hit the control buttons on the arm of his chair. That would have destroyed his power."

The physician sighed. "He was—or possibly still is—the greatest criminal that ever lived. He was merciless, cruel, inhuman. He had absolutely no concern for the sufferings of others. But you, young man," he nodded at Kent, "and the world at large owe him a debt

of gratitude for two things he did."

"What—what things?"

"You are indebted to him for saving the life of your fiancee. She came to me over a month ago, complaining of severe pains in her head. The diagnosis—and you can confirm this from my associates whom I called in—was tumor of the brain. Inoperable and incurable. She had possibly a month to live."

KENT'S mind was reeling again. He turned dazed eyes to the girl at his side. "That is the truth, Kent," she whispered. "When I left the doctor's office the day I disappeared, I knew the truth at last. I had a month to live, possibly less. I didn't know whether to tell you or not, and I desperately wanted a place where I could be alone, so I could think things out for myself. Dr. Kilgour offered me his sanitarium. That was why I disappeared. I only wanted some place to go and die."

"But—but what happened?"

"Dr. Destiny saw her in my sanitarium," Kilgour said. "He kidnaped her to be his queen. But then he discovered that she was doomed to die. In his youth he had been a surgeon, and he is today the greatest living surgeon on earth. As proof of that, Marcia can show you the scars of her operation. No other doctor would have attempted that operation. It was too delicate, too difficult, too hard to perform. But Dr. Destiny attempted it. And succeeded. Bad as he was, he saved the life of your fiancee for you. Oh, he didn't mean for you to have her, but the fact remains, he saved her life when no one else could have done it."

The physician's words fell like blows. Marcia — Kent's Marcia — had been doomed. At last he knew the explanation for her disappearance, the reason the elevator operator had thought she

(Concluded on page 41)

Trouble in Avalon

by RUSSELL STORM

"There ain't no such thing as ghosts!" roared Sergeant Buttle. But when he led his patrol into No Man's Land that night, things happened . . .

SERGEANT BUTTLE had a nasty eye. He used it to transfix the two huskies standing smartly at attention before him.

"Headquarters," he said, in a soft voice that did not for one second deceive his hearers, "has a tip that the enemy is preparing to launch an offensive against this section of the line."

He paused, to let this information sink into the minds of his hearers. It sank. Private Leo Terry shifted his weight to his left foot. Private John Spaulding tried to look as if he had never heard of gin.

"I have been instructed to ask for volunteers," Buttle continued. "I need two men to go out and scout the enemy lines, with me in an effort to determine whether or not the enemy has made preparations for an offensive."

"With the sergeant's permission, sir," Private John Spaulding said, "what about the air service? Don't their pictures show up troop concentrations?"

"Not," said Buttle acidly, "if the troops are underground. No. We will have to send a small patrol, the smaller the better. I want two good men to vol-

unteer to go with me." His eyes dug into the two men facing him.

Terry shifted his weight to his right foot. Spaulding swallowed.

"Well!" said Buttle.

Spaulding moistened his lips—

"Good," said Buttle in a satisfied tone of voice. "Your response to my request for volunteers is very pleasing. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I accept you two men for dangerous duty."

"What I meant, sir—" Spaulding began.

"What did you mean?" Buttle roared.

"—Nothing, sir."

"Good," Buttle answered. "We will leave at midnight. Pistols and trench knives. No rifles. See that you are ready at the appointed time."

Terry glumly watched the sergeant leave. Out of the corner of his mouth he glumly said, "Damn it, you ought to have found out whose gin that was before you stole it. You're getting us killed. Buttle means to take us out there in No Man's Land and feed us to the Heinies."

"How'd I know it was his gin?" Spaulding defended. "Anyhow you'



Knights went down in heaps beneath the ruthless Nazi fire

helped drink it. What'd you drink it for if you knew it belonged to Buttle?"

"I gotta notion to mutiny," said Terry darkly.

"Yeah, and Buttle would have you shot. He wouldn't wait for dawn, either. Better take a chance on the Heinies than on Buttle."

"Hell," said Terry. "It ain't the Heinies I mind. It's—"

"It's what?"

"It's them damned ghosts," Terry said desperately. "Just as sure as God made little green apples, we'll be out there scouting around tonight and the first thing we know a ghost will lean over our shoulder and gnash his teeth, and—"

Terry, besides standing six feet tall, weighed over two hundred pounds. Every inch and every pound of him shuddered.

"I'd damned well welcome a tussle with a ghost," Spaulding answered.

"*You* would," Terry answered. "But for cripes' sake, don't say anything to Buttle about ghosts. You know how he feels about 'em. He threatened to court martial the next man who even brought up the subject. Said these stories about ghosts were weakening our morale."

"There's not anything had about ghosts," Spaulding defended. "You treat 'em right and they'll treat you right."

"That's what *you* think," said Terry.

The sector they were occupying, while quiet in the military sense, was unusually active in another sense. If you believed the tales told by the army, it had the best collection of ghosts of any place on the Western Front. Tall ghosts, short ghosts, fat ghosts, skinny ghosts; even ghosts in armor.

Which was not so remarkable, considering that this section of France had been fought over since the dawn of history. Gauls, Romans, Germans, Sax-

ons, English, Americans, and Canadians. Terry and Spaulding were both Americans, fighting in a Canadian regiment, as volunteers. They had volunteered in Windsor, Ontario, after spending a week-end there experimenting heavily with Canadian ale.

"Wish I was back in Detroit," said Terry. "Wish I was back on the line, putting automobiles together."

"Not me," said Spaulding. "Those damned factories will make a man old before his time. What I want is a little excitement."

"Well, you'll probably get it before the night is over," Terry answered.

PROMPTLY at midnight Sergeant Buttle collected his two volunteers and shoved off into No Man's Land. At this point the main lines of opposing fortifications were separated by several miles, the forts following ridges that swept around a valley. No attempt had been made by either side to set up pill-boxes or machine gun nests in the valley because such positions, being under the fire of the heavy guns in the opposing forts, were untenable. But this No Man's Land was a happy hunting ground for scouting parties—and ghosts.

"It's dark out here," said Terry gloomily, staring into blackness.

"I suppose you prefer to do your scouting in the daylight," Sergeant Buttle answered. "Get along with you."

"All right, but quit pushing me," Terry snapped back.

"I didn't push you."

"Huh—?" There was a chattering sound. "Are—are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. What's that noise?"

The chattering stopped for a few seconds, then started again.

"That's Terry's teeth," Spaulding diagnosed.

"What?" Buttle spoke pleasantly into the darkness. "Private Terry, if you don't stop those teeth from chattering, I promise you faithfully I'll kick every last one of them out of your head."

"I'm—I'm trying to. But somebody pushed me."

"Nonsense. There's no one here but us. Who would push you?"

"That's—that's what I've been asking myself," Terry answered.

"If there is any pushing done around here, I'll do it," Buttle said. "Remember that, please. Now move along."

They pushed forward. There had been a lop-sided moon in the sky, but it had set, and the night was as black as the tunnel to hell. Strange sounds came through the darkness.

"Private Terry," Sergeant Buttle hissed. "Your teeth are chattering again."

"Uck," the strangled answer came.

"What's that?"

An aggrieved voice told him, "Why can't you give me a chance to answer? My teeth haven't been chattering. I've been holding a cork out of a—a cork in my mouth, so they wouldn't." Terry had been on the verge of saying a cork out of a bottle of gin, but had changed his mind in time.

"Very well," Buttle answered. "We will continue advancing. Private Spaulding, quit stepping on my feet."

"I haven't been, sir. I haven't been anywhere near you," Spaulding's voice answered virtuously from a spot several yards to the left.

"Then it's you, McLaren."

"It's not been me, sir. I haven't been near the sergeant, sir," Terry's voice answered from the right.

"Well, somebody did." Buttle's voice sounded mystified.

"Perhaps the sergeant stepped on his own feet," Spaulding suggested.

"That will cost you ten days in the guard house. I guess I know when somebody steps on my foot."

"I'd a durned sight druther be in the guard house than out here," Terry spoke.

"Hah! Showing cowardice in the face of the enemy. That's a charge for a court martial, Terry."

"It ain't the enemy I'm scared of," Terry replied. "It's them ghosts."

ONLY the fear that an enemy patrol might be near kept Buttle from exploding. "There are no such things as ghosts, Terry," he hissed. "Do you understand that clearly? All this talk about ghosts is superstitious folderol, rumors started by the enemy to weaken our morale. Ghosts do not exist. Do you understand?"

"Yes sir," said Terry hastily. "Yes sir. I understand."

"Then get moving."

Unquestionably enemy patrols were out. Twice they heard harsh gutturals in the darkness. And when they managed to approach the enemy lines, they heard sounds that really meant something to the military ear of the sergeant.

"Hear that?" he whispered. "Tanks being brought up. One at a time, with muffled motors. That's a sure sign of an attack. The enemy is planning an attack through here."

There was no mistaking the sound. Although the motors were muffled, the heavy throb of a mechanized unit moving up under cover of darkness came clearly through the night.

"Headquarters must have this information at once," Buttle said. "Come on."

His two volunteers needed no urging. They began beating a stealthy hut hasty retreat through the night.

And just in time. Before an attack, the enemy patrols were dourly on the

alert. The sharp spang of a rifle sounded behind them. Then an automatic rifle stuttered. Bullets cut paths through the air.

"Run!" Buttle hissed.

Terry and Spaulding didn't need that order. The night was as black as the inside of a cow and they couldn't see where they were going, but under the circumstances they were willing to trust to guesswork. The rifle stopped firing. But they could hear the pounding feet of an enemy patrol following them.

"Faster!" Buttle gasped.

"We'll break our damned necks running like this when it's so dark," Spaulding protested.

The words had no sooner left his lips than the ground gave way beneath him. His feet, anticipating solid earth under them, suddenly met nothing but air. He turned over and over and hit with a solid thud that knocked the breath out of him.

Terry and the sergeant were right behind him. They hit the same place where the ground should have been, but wasn't.

WHEN Spaulding recovered consciousness, his first thought was that he was having a nightmare. Then he wondered if he had swallowed a bullet, and died, and gone to heaven. Or to some other place.

The night was over. He could see. It was what he saw that gave him the jumps.

A man in armor. It looked exactly like a suit of armor Spaulding had once seen in a museum, except that there was a man in it. The visor was up and Spaulding could see the man's face. The man looked perplexed.

He had a broadsword in his hands that was at least six feet long. He was picking his teeth with the sword.

"One slip with that pig sticker," Spaulding thought, "and he'll cut half

his chin off." But the toothpicker didn't make any slips. He handled the sword with a facility that was positively amazing. Glass-eyed, Spaulding watched him. He scarcely noticed the other men in armor.

"Swounds," said the toothpicker meditatively. "Three there be. Perchance we should take them to the Wizard, no doubt."

It was at this point that Terry awakened and saw the men in armor. "Uck," said Terry. He started to scramble to his feet.

Very neatly and very expertly, the toothpicker hit Terry across the head with the flat of his sword.

"Uck," said Terry, but with no expression this time. He slid to the ground.

Toothpicker resumed picking his teeth.

Then Sergeant Buttle awakened. He got promptly to his feet and glared at the men in armor. "Who are you?" he demanded.

Toothpicker scraped away at the enamel of an incisor. He said nothing.

"Watch it, Sergeant," Spaulding whispered. "If one of those guys punches you with his sword—"

"Shut up!" Buttle roared. "I'll handle this." He turned again to the men in armor. "I shall make a full report of this matter to your commanding officer. Masquerading, playing games, digging suits of armor out of museums and pretending to be knights! Identify yourselves immediately and consider yourselves under arrest."

"Sh—" Spaulding whispered.

"Don't 'Sh' me," Buttle answered.

Toothpicker was a genius with his sword. One instant he was picking his teeth with it. The next instant it was whizzing through the air. It landed, flat side down, right on top of Sergeant Buttle's tin hat.

"Ugh," said Buttle.

Spaulding sighed dreamily. "Now I know where I am," he said. "I'm in heaven. Any place where they hit top kicks over the head *must* be heaven."

"Thy weapon," said Toothpicker, turning toward Spaulding and pricking him gently in the wishbone with the tip of his sword. Spaulding surrendered his pistol. The men in armor took Terry's and Buttle's guns. They looked distastefully at the pistols, their lips wrinkling in disgust.

"Foul things," one said.

"Fit only for cowards," a second agreed.

"Throw them in yon pool," a third suggested.

"And their owners with them," added a fourth.

"Nay," said Toothpicker. "Their weapons yes, but not them. The Wizard is sober this morning and he might not like it if we failed to bring these men before him. You know how he is about such matters. He might turn us into pigs, perchance, or hares."

"Hell," Spaulding thought.

"Did you hear what they said?" an agonized whisper came from beside him. He looked around. Terry was sitting up. He was fingering the lump on top of his head. "Where are we, anyhow?"

"I don't know," Spaulding answered. "But wherever this place is, they sure play rough."

How rough they played, he learned later.

AT the command of Toothpicker he and Terry picked up the unconscious sergeant and supporting him between them, turned down a rough trail the knights indicated. The knights followed—on horseback.

"How about me riding behind you, partner?" Spaulding asked, looking enviously at the armored man nearest him.

But the man did not answer. He merely twirled his lance suggestively. Spaulding took the hint.

Sergeant Buttle regained consciousness. "Who hit me?" were his first words. "Let me at him. I'll tear him apart!"

"Sh," said Spaulding.

"Sh, hell! Ooooh!" Buttle seemed to lose his voice as one of the knights dipped his lance down and jabbed it back and forth toward Buttle's stomach. Without touching the sergeant, however, Buttle was silent.

For perhaps a mile they marched through an unfamiliar world. The Western Front was gone. No gun emplacements, no machine gun nests, no planes circling overhead. All traces of the war were gone.

"You suppose we're dead?" said Terry nervously.

"God knows," Spaulding answered. He seemed to have settled into the depths of gloom. Really he was wondering how he could get the fifth of gin out of his knapsack and help himself to a drink without the sergeant seeing him.

They came to a low stone structure that looked like a small castle.

Seated on a stool in front of the castle was a man. He wore no armor. Clad in a long dark cloak and a three cornered black hat, he sat, chin in hand and elbow on knee, and glowered at them as they approached.

The knights doffed their lances.

"Great Merlin!"

The words almost knocked Spaulding over. He had read that name in a book once. This glowering man with the sour puss was—Merlin!

Merlin stood up. He was tall and as skinny as a scarecrow. He had a long, beaky nose and a bony face.

And he was mad.

"Ho!" he said. "Ho!"

The knights looked nervously at each

other.

"Great Merlin. Mighty Magician—"

"Shut up!" Merlin roared. "No explanation do I need. Very plainly can I see what has happened."

He began to shout at the top of his voice. "*Arthur! Arthur!*"

"Gosh," Spaulding thought. "Gosh."

Merlin waited for an answer. It didn't come. He took a deep breath.

"*ARTHUR!* You hear me, Arthur, and I know it. You better answer me."

No answer came. The knights fidgeted nervously. Toothpicker quit scraping at a molar. No answer.

"Damn that lackwitted king for a fool," Merlin said. "*ARTHUR!* Just ten seconds do I give you. Answer me. King or no king, I'll have thy hide."

"Oh, all right," said a voice from around behind the castle.

ARTHUR came. He was walking and his Excalibur in its scabbard was dragging the ground. Arthur was a short, squat, roly-poly man. He was wearing armor, but his visor was up, and on his face was all the fearful truculence of a small boy being called to account for stealing apples.

"Oh, all right, Magician. What do you want now?"

"What do I want! What do I want indeed! Forsooth, it is obvious what I want," Merlin roared. "Thou hast left the barrier open, and these three knaves have blundered into Avalon. Answer me, Arthur. What explanation do you have for leaving the gate open and permitting trash like this to clutter up Avalon?"

Arthur avoided the subject. He stamped and snorted and called Merlin a faint-hearted knave. "Hiding here when there is good hard fighting without. Besides, Magician, I will have you remember that I am king here, not you."

"Hah! Wouldst remind me that you

are king? Wouldst remind you it was my wizardry that created this land out of time! Go kick these strangers hence, and close the gate, and give me no more of this double-talk."

"Phaw!" said Arthur.

"Don't 'Phaw' me," snapped Merlin. "It's your fault and you know it. Every time another war pops up, you start to itch. You go around whetting Excalibur on your hoot and sharpening your lances and begging me to move us to the scene of action. Well, I humor you. And what do I get? I get *this!*" He pointed dramatically at Sergeant Buttle.

Buttle nervously edged away.

"Nothing is hurt," Arthur grumbled.

"That is what you always say," Merlin answered. "Little you understand how I work day and night— What's that?" A volley of shots had sounded.

"It's the enemy patrol that was following us," Spaulding whispered. "They've blundered through the gate too."

"Smoke sticks," diagnosed Merlin. "We have been invaded, and it's all your fault, and I hope you're satisfied," he said to Arthur.

"Hah," Arthur said happily. "Where are those knaves that have blundered in here? At them, Men of the Table Round."

The knights looked positively pleased. The air was instantly full of six-foot steel blades. Arthur's men looked like kids invited to a birthday party.

"What ho!" Arthur said. "Gird on thy blades and we will have at them."

Arthur went around behind the castle and emerged mounted upon a magnificent stallion. By this time the knights were several hundred yards away. Arthur charged behind them, waving Excalibur in the air.

"Well," said Terry slowly, taking a deep breath. "Well."

"What in the hell has happened to

us?" said Buttle plaintively.

"I think it's like this," Spaulding answered. "We've blundered into another world. I read a story once about King Arthur. He didn't die. He was taken to Avalon and he's lived there ever since. That's where we are—in Avalon."

"And every time a war comes up, Arthur gets Merlin to move Avalon to where the fighting is," Terry added.

"You may be right," Buttle said. "The important thing is—we've got to get back to headquarters. There's an attack coming."

"It sounds like," Terry interrupted, nodding his head in the direction the knights had gone, "the attack has already come."

The rattle of murderous rifle fire had sounded. Mingled with it was the shrill peal of war cries.

"They've found the enemy and have charged," said Buttle. "Come on. If they've knocked over that patrol, maybe we'll have a chance to slip out of this place."

THHEY started down the trail. The rifle fire had ceased. Rather abruptly, Spaulding thought.

From the top of a little rise they saw why the rifle fire had ceased.

Below them, at the beginning of a little glade, was a tangle of men and horses, dead.

"Great Jehosaphat!" Buttle breathed, surveying the scene. "The damned fools tried to charge a patrol that had an automatic rifle. It was murder. Murder!"

Horses and men were piled indiscriminately together.

"They ain't all there," said Terry, counting. "Some of 'em must have run whea that rifle let loose."

"What I can't understand," said Spaulding, "is how they kept from getting killed centuries ago. Arthur must

have lived almost a thousand years ago. And from what Merlin said, every time a war breaks out Arthur wants to go. It looks to me like he would have got one between the eyes long before now."

"Well, he's probably got it at last," said Terry. "Maybe he never ran into an automatic rifle before. Maybe they thought they were charging a smoothbore muzzle-loader that wouldn't more than dent their armor."

"Poor old Arthur," Spaulding sniffed. "I kind of liked him."

As he spoke a rifle fired again, and a bullet pinged through the air near them. They ducked out of sight.

"Hell," said Buttle. "That damned patrol is still kicking. If we only had our guns we might do something about it." He glared at Spaulding. "What did you let them take our guns away from us for?"

"Let them!" Spaulding echoed. "I'd have liked to see you keep them from doing it!"

"Hist," a voice said.

Arthur stepped from behind a bush. There was a dent in his armor where a slug had creased him and the plume had been shot away from his helmet but otherwise he looked undamaged. Toothpicker and another of his knights were with him.

"We thought you were dead!" Spaulding gasped.

"I was bringing up the rear," Arthur answered. "And I apprehended what was happening in time to escape the trap. Hast any plans about how we can destroy yon knaves?"

The three shook their heads. "We might as well tackle a grizzly bear with a club as to try to take those boys when they have guns," Buttle explained.

Arthur looked disappointed. "I was afraid of it," he said, sighing. "Well, needs must go to the devil, I guess. Do you, Toothpicker, go see if Merlin will

aid us in exterminating this nest of vipers."

Toothpicker shook his head. "Merlin would have my head if I went near him. He's in a bad humor this morning." He seemed reluctant to discuss the matter further.

"Yes, yes, I know," Arthur sighed. "And he blames me for it too. As if I could be expected to think of everything! But do you go and call to him from a distance. Be firm with him."

Toothpicker saluted. "Very well, O King. But if I return in the form of a pig, never say I did not tell you." He went off through the brush, mumbling to himself.

"What's the matter with Merlin?" Spaulding inquired. "Is he mad because you left the gate open?"

"That—and other things," Arthur answered.

WHILE they waited for Toothpicker's return they vainly attempted to devise some plan for ousting the enemy patrol.

"It's these devilish new weapons," Arthur complained bitterly. "Time was when men fought with honest tools. Why I remember once—"

"I think Toothpicker returns," the remaining knight hurriedly interrupted.

"I was only going to say—"

"I know," the knight answered. "For almost a thousand years now I've heard you tell that tale, and if I may say so, my lord, I'm sick and tired of it."

Arthur purpled and started to pull Excalibur from its scabbard, but Toothpicker's arrival distracted him from his purpose.

"What did he say?" Arthur demanded.

"He said, 'You got yourself into this. Now get yourself out of it, and be damned for all of him.'"

"Dash that magician anyhow. I was

afraid he would be stubborn. Did you tell him that my men are stiffening here in this glade?"

"He said, 'Let 'em stiffen.'"

"Oh fie," said Arthur fretfully. "He knows how hard they are to get along with if he lets them stiffen too much. Why, one time when he let Lancelot lay for two days, I thought Guinevere would never get over it."

"What's that?" Spaulding gasped. "You mean he can bring the dead back to life?"

"Of course," Arthur answered. "He has patched all of us many a time. But when he is annoyed, he may let us lay around until we get so stiff it may take us months to work the kinks out of our joints. Damn him anyhow," Arthur petulantly finished. He flung Excalibur back into its scabbard and stalked off into the forest.

"Well," said Spaulding thoughtfully. "Well." While Terry and the sergeant watched, Spaulding drew Toothpicker off to one side and held a lengthy conversation with him. They could see the knight shaking his head and bear him muttering. Then Spaulding came back.

"I've discovered what is wrong with Merlin," he said. "And I've got an idea. I'm going back and see him. You two wait here. Maybe I can do something with this recalcitrant magician, if—" He coughed delicately.

"If what?" snapped Buttle. "If you know how to get out of here and are deliberately withholding the information, I'll have you shot so fast it will make your head swim."

Spaulding blinked. "I assure the sergeant that I am not withholding information. I merely have an idea. It may work, or it may not. If it does work, I feel that—ah—certain pecadillos should be—ah—forgotten."

"Blackmail," Buttles stormed. "But go on and try it. If it does work, I

assure you that nothing you have done in the past will be held against you. If it doesn't work, I'll shoot you myself."

Spaulding's face paled. But he held resolutely to his purpose. "Very well, sir. I will do the best I can."

"You damn well better," Buttles flung after him as he walked off.

"I hope he knows what he is doing," said Terry fervently.

"So do I," Buttles answered. "I just remembered he was in the lead when we stumbled into this place and I've been trying to decide whether he brought us here intentionally."

"Oh, no," Terry replied. "John wouldn't do anything like that, not to his friends."

"He's not a friend of mine," Buttles answered. "If he's got something up his sleeve, why didn't he tell us what it was?"

"John is kind of secretive," Terry hedged.

"Well, he had better find some way to get us out of here or I'll put him where he can be secretive for a long time. I got the worst kind of creeps."

"What over?" Terry inquired.

"I got to thinking. When we started on patrol, you said somebody pushed you. Then somebody stepped on my foot and both of you denied doing it. What I'm wondering is, did these ghosts do it!"

"Probably," Terry answered. "They run around out there in No Man's Land like they owned it." Terry had lost his fear of ghosts.

"Here comes Spaulding," Buttles said. "And Merlin is with him."

MERLIN was not only with him, Merlin was walking arm in arm with him.

Arthur reappeared out of the forest. "Well, Magician," he greeted Merlin. "Have you at last regained your

senses?"

"Where is the enemy?" Merlin demanded. "Let me at them!"

Merlin had lost his grouch completely. He was in the gayest kind of humor. Arthur and his two knights stared at him appalled.

"Swounds," Arthur muttered. "Merlin laughing! I never thought I'd live to see the day."

Merlin set about his enchantment. First he sent snakes. The snakes were probably not real, but they looked real, and that was all that mattered. The snakes went wriggling off toward the enemy. Horrified yells resounded from the place where the patrol had dug in. Rifle fire blasted.

"Hah!" said Merlin. "Hah!"

He sent more snakes. More rifle fire sounded.

"I don't see how he is going to whip those babies with imaginary snakes," said Buttles dubiously.

"Have faith in Merlin," Spaulding answered. "He knows what he's doing."

Merlin sent an animal that looked like an elephant, except that it had the head of a giraffe. Knocking trees in every direction, it moved toward the enemy. Horrified yells came again. And more rifle fire. The rifle fire stopped suddenly.

Merlin sighed. "Those smoke sticks are out of ammunition," he said. "Now Arthur and his two knights can handle them. Get going, my bully braves. Knock them over the head with your swords and toss them out of Avalon."

"Gladly, Magician," said Arthur. "If you're sure they're out of ammunition."

"I'm sure of it," Merlin answered.

Thus reassured, Arthur and his two knights set off toward the enemy. Horrified yells sounded. The yells speedily died into silence.

"Well, my brave fellows," said Mer-

lim gayly. "Much as I regret it, it's out of Avalon for you now. But first—" He drew Spaulding to one side and whispered to him. Spaulding turned his back on his watching comrades and surreptitiously gave something to Merlin. The magician slipped it under his robe. Then he shook hands with Spaulding.

He escorted them to the gate.

"Goodbye, my fine fellows," he said, with just the faintest sign of a hiccup. "If you should chance to find the gate open, come again."

AVALON vanished into the mists of the morning. The Western Front rose up around them.

"What I want to know," said Terry, "is what did you do to Merlin to make him help us? He was as cross as two bears when we stumbled into that place. But after you talked to him, he was as friendly as a mess-mate trying to borrow two dollars. What kind of a miracle did you work on him?"

"Yes," Sergeant Buttle added, a little awed. "What did you do to him?"

"It wasn't anything," Spaulding answered, trying to change the subject. "If you treat ghosts right, they'll treat you right."

"Answer me," Buttle ordered. "What was the matter with Merlin?"

"Well, if you must know," Spaulding said defensively. "He was sober."

"Sober?" Buttle echoed.

"Yes. You see when Arthur talked him into moving Avalon to the Western Front, Arthur forgot to bring the wine along. Merlin hadn't had a drink for a week. Those old boys were used to having their wine three times a day. Merlin had been half drunk for a thousand years. Naturally, when he sobered up, he had a hangover that had been building up for the same length of time. What a head he must have had—the morning after a thousand

years of drinking!"

"Jehosophat!" Buttle gasped. His eyes grew round with awe. "What did you do to cure him?"

"Oh, nothing," said Spaulding. "Hadn't we better get our dope about that attack back to headquarters?"

"We've plenty of time to take care of that," Buttle answered. "First, I want to know how you cured Merlin."

"Well, if you must know," said Spaulding, "I gave him a slug of gin."

"Gin!" Buttle gasped. His eyes narrowed with grim suspicion. "My gin? You stole my gin and gave it to a ghost!" His face grew purple.

"Keep calm," Spaulding answered. "In the first place, according to army regulations, ghosts are not even to be mentioned. In the second place, you promised me, in the presence of a witness, that nothing I have done in the past will be held against me if I got us out of Avalon. And I got us out. In the third place . . ."

"That's enough!" Buttle howled. "I know when I'm licked. But I want this made mighty clear: the next time you steal my gin, even King Arthur and Merlin won't save you from the longest stretch of K. P. this army ever saw!"

* * *

THEREAFTER, at various times during the course of the war, soldiers reported seeing a strange figure clad in ancient armor. He was always to be found in the thick of the fighting, wielding a heavy broadsword and uttering strange battle cries. The psychologists, and all sensible people, hearing these whispered tales, talked learnedly of the strangeness of the human mind, its susceptibility to mass hypnosis, etc. But only Privates Leo Terry and John Spaulding—and possibly Sergeant Buttle—really knew what was happening—that King Arthur was playing hooky from Avalon again.

DR. DESTINY, MASTER OF THE DEAD

(Concluded from page 29)

was drugged when she came out of Dr. Kilgour's office. She had just been told that she didn't have a chance to live.

"I made Dr. Kilgour promise he wouldn't tell you until I had decided what to do," Marcia said. "Oh, Kent, I should have told, but I just couldn't."

"That operation was performed yesterday morning," Dr. Kilgour continued. "Normally a patient who had undergone such an operation would need months to recover. But she is almost completely recovered now—less than forty-eight hours afterwards."

Kent could only stare at him.

"That's the debt, the world owes Dr. Destiny," Kilgour finished. "He invented a healing salve that is almost magical in its properties. Applied to a wound, it stimulates nature to do within hours what would ordinarily take days. You can easily imagine what this is going to mean to the medical profession."

Inadvertently and unintentionally Dr. Destiny had given life to one person and had provided the means of easing the suffering of thousands. He had done good. If he was alive, that thought

probably annoyed him exceedingly.

His empire, his kingdom of the living dead, was gone. Now that its whereabouts was known, he would not dare to attempt to revive it. His slaves were free again to work out their own fate.

As they struggled to find their way out of the caverns, they saw a figure stumbling toward them. Bloody, dirty, battered, but still undaunted, it came toward them. It was the Deacon. He hadn't been killed. "Boy, did we hold that line!" he exulted.

Cincy Slim and Dan greeted him effusively.

As they emerged from the caverns the first thing they heard was a man swearing. It was Hanagan. "I let myself get knocked over the head," he moaned. "And I thought I was a detective."

The word roused unpleasant memories in the Deacon's mind. "A bull!" he gasped, not understanding that Hanagan was a private detective. "Come on, boys, let's blow. I mean," he hastily amended, "let us expedite our removal from this spot with all possible facility."

The Editors' Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 5)

HERE'S good news for such of us as have a sneaking fondness for those social outcasts of the vegetable kingdom, the lowly onion and garlic. Scientists have recently discovered they're good for what ails you!

This is only what a lot of folks have always claimed—but they were accused of merely inventing excuses for bad breath. Doctors peoh-peohed the idea that garlic and onions could be a cure for colds, or acne and eczema, or anything else. Old wives' tales!

But one researcher remembered that the natives of malaria-ridden Peru used to nibble the bark of

a certain jungle tree. And it had turned out that they really had something there, for it was found that that bark contained quinine, today recognized as one of medicine's best weapons against malaria! So this researcher went to work, and just recently he announced he had extracted a substance called crotonealdehyde from garlic. And not only did it kill cold germs, but it went after such deadly bacteria as cause tuberculosis and peritonitis!

No one knows yet exactly how it works (unless the germs just can't take it), but the scientists are already digging into the onion now for more hidden wonders. And those of us who consume the ten thousand tons of garlic and a billion and a quarter pounds of onions eaten in the U. S. each year, are going to stop apologizing. An onion a day keeps the doctor away!

WHICH winds up the Observatory clock for this issue. See you next month. *Rap*

The REFLECTION



THE end of the universe was right here in Professor Braun's laboratory, and he could cross it with one step

THIRTY-ONE MINUTES PAST NOON

"WELL, well!" smiled Razetti, lining the snub-nosed automatic up with Professor Harmon Braun's stomach, "it's too bad you have to die, ain't it?"

Braun's faded eyes were wide. His upheld hands were shaking.

"You can't kill me," he said hoarsely. "You mustn't. Not now. Not when I've got so many things to give the world."

"Ha-ha!" said Razetti. "Write it on ice, will you? What do I care about the world, anyway? They put me in the clink for a life term, didn't they?"

"Because you committed a ghastly murder. You deserved life imprisonment. You can't blame me for doing my duty on that jury as any American citizen would. And you should be in prison now."

"Should I! Should I?" Razetti snarled. "Why do you think I broke stir, you old buzzard? It was to pay you back for having your jury bring out a verdict of guilty. You was the only one crazy enough to hold out for the guilty

THAT LIVED



An eerie sensation swept through Stanton as he grasped Professor Brown's hand

verdict. It was *your* fault! Yeah. I broke out just so I could kill you."

His close-set eyes switched to Jim Stanton, who also stood with hands upraised.

He said almost sorrowfully, "And you, too, big fella. It's your bad luck you happened to be here." His reedy voice added almost plaintively, "But I got to cover up behind me, don't I?"

"Sure," said Jim Stanton.

He was from the Patent Office, looking into the possibilities of one of Braun's inventions. His hard blue eyes were almost disinterested, apparently, in the proceedings.

"You a main liner?" Stanton asked.

Razetti blinked. Then, reluctantly:

"Yeah, I put the snow in the big veins, where it'll do the most good."

Even as he said this, he was thinking regretfully what a fool he had been not to take a big, stiff dose of morphine before he'd ever come here. He felt dizzy, weak.

Even on his way here, things had been blurring before his eyes. But that wasn't exactly it. He could have stood that. It was something else, *something about this room*.

IT was the basement of the house, and it served as Braun's laboratory. The funny thing was that it was bounded, entirely along two sides, parallel to the stairs that ran down from the kitchen, by huge mirrors.

At least, they looked like mirrors; but they had funny tricks of reflection. Thus Razetti, who stood with his back removed a few inches from one mirror, could look across the room and see his back reflected in the other mirror.

His back! How could that be? Mirrors reversed things. If you stood with your face to a mirror, you had your face reflected.

And yet, though the two men whom

Razetti was shortly going to kill had their backs faced to that mirror across the room, it was the front of their bodies that he saw!

Yes, this was definitely flukey. But he wasn't going to worry about it. Not now, anyway. It was just because he hadn't taken a shot. That *must* be it; he often saw screwy things when he didn't have enough snow in him.

He thoughtfully took a steadier grip on his gun. He tensed his nerves for this, his third and fourth—or was it his fourth and fifth?—murder.

Stanton watched him, reading the signs uneasily. What could he do? In his mind he was somewhat amused, in an abstract way. The situation seemed incongruous, somehow, in spite of the very real menace of the killer.

Thirty-one minutes ago, he would have laughed if someone had told him that very shortly he would be face to face with death . . .

II

ONE MINUTE PAST NOON

JIM STANTON absently hummed through pleasantly curved lips as he jabbed a blunt finger against the bell. He was a little skeptical of Braun's claims. The old man had written the Patent Office that he had an invention which would revolutionize the whole transportation industry in all its phases. He'd further said they'd better send a man to investigate before he, Braun, sold it to somebody else.

When the door opened, Stanton's skepticism crystallized into surety. Braun had flowing white hair, narrow shoulders, pot-belly, and faded blue eyes. He *looked* like a screwball inventor with a crackpot idea.

But, as Stanton introduced himself, the old man made him step in with a sur-

prisly clear and mellow voice. After he closed the door, he stood there, rubbing his hands as he appraised Stanton's six feet of height.

Then he was chuckling:

"From the Patent Office, eh! You look it. You look it! Skeptical, skeptical. But I'll show you, Stanton. In a little while you'll realize that this night will go down in history!"

Stanton found himself following the old man down a steep flight of stairs to the basement.

"My invention," Braun cried, "will render trains, automobiles, liners, elevators and aircraft useless. Except for purposes of recreation. Must be handled carefully, though," he cautioned, in warning. "May lead to the worst economic slump in history!"

Braun switched on the lights.

Stanton looked around.

"Not much," exclaimed Braun, waving a shaking hand. "Shelf of chemicals. Dismantled X-ray machine—in the corner there. Wilson Cloud Chamber—not much good with all the electrical disturbance around here.

"Don't bother with the physical end of invention much. Work everything out on paper. When something seems promising, I experiment.

"Don't mind the musty odor. It's that bushel of potatoes. Now! Look at these machines."

THREE machines—two of them—were each set into the wall on either side of the stairs. They looked like X-ray equipment. A great deal like it, Stanton observed.

From the way the machines were arranged, it was apparent that, in operation, they could send a sheet of radiation out across the width of the room, in flat, vertical walls parallel to each other.

"Somewhat like X-ray machines,"

agreed Braun, rubbing hands enthusiastically. "Somewhat! That is, there's the familiar cathode, anode, and target. But you won't find that the target is made of the ordinary elements used to produce X-rays at all. Quite another element, Stanton, quite another.

"Glad to see you know some science, thought! You're aware that in the ordinary X-ray tube, the target gives off light, heat, and X-rays? That the vibration is 10,000 times more rapid than that of ordinary light?" *

"And that the vibration of the X-rays differs with the element of the target," Stanton broke in. "I understand that. Let's get to the heart of the matter. In what respect does this new element differ in its X-ray output?"

Braun said sharply, "Don't know how they differ. Except that they do something to space. Shake the ether particles, perhaps. How could I know what they do? I don't even know why molecules hurry up when they're heated. Lots of things nobody knows, isn't there?"

Then he snapped one of the machines into action. He said, triumphantly, "All I know is the effect!"

* X-rays, or Röntgen rays, is the name given to the radiations which, in the general spectrum of electromagnetic waves, occur after ultra-violet rays as we pass toward the shorter wave lengths. It is difficult to define the region exactly. As is well known, the visible spectrum extends from the wave lengths of the extreme red to the furthest violet. Next follows the ultra-violet and then a region is reached where the absorption of the radiation by all kinds of matter becomes very great. It is in the region of about 1,000 Angstrom units that we may place the beginning of the X-ray.

However, it must be remembered that there is a variation in this area, since the radiations of the ultra-violet series of hydrogen are undoubtedly the terms of an X-ray series (the K series) of this gas. At the short wave length end we may regard the K waves of Uranium, or more exactly, the K discontinuities of this element, as marking the limit of a region of radiations intimately connected with the electronic structure of the atom, from which point the gamma rays begin.—Eo.

Stanton had sound nerves. He had a strong heart. And a healthy body. But nevertheless, the "effect" made him jump physically and mentally.

A black sheet of nothingness stretched across the room, cut away a third of the room as if it had dropped into a gulf of blackness such as must obtain in outmost interstellar space itself! *

Stanton involuntarily jumped back. He looked somewhat sheepish, as he collected himself.

Braun grasped his pot-belly in two hands and laughed gleefully.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he gasped. "Afraid you'd fall in. Afraid there wasn't anything behind it. Now you are not skeptical!"

He continued to laugh until Stanton got red in the face.

"Cut it out," he said in irritation. "What is it?"

Braun stopped laughing as if he was able to control his mirth just by turning it off somewhere.

"The end of space," he said dramatically.

Stanton said with patience, "Go on from there." He selected a chair. "You," he suggested, "had best ask your own questions. Then I'll get the right answers."

WOOD scraped against wood as Braun pulled a chair up. His

* No one on Earth can possibly imagine how utterly black absolutely unlighted empty space must be. Even in the darkest mine on Earth, there is some radiation, some source of light to destroy any possibility of absolute blackness. Even our black paint is made up of a combination of other colors! Out in the empty reaches of space, where not even a fleck of dust exists, beyond reach of any starlight, must exist so terrifying a blackness that were we to experience it for just one moment, it would have far-reaching effects on our nervous system. Thus, no wonder that Stanton jumped when confronted suddenly with a bit of absolute black.—Ed.

knees were almost touching Stanton's. He said:

"If you leave from a stationary point in space, you arrive back where you start, eventually—if you travel a straight line. That's a rule which applies to the theory of a finite, spherical universe. Einstein will say that such a voyager has traveled a great circle along the three-dimensional surface of a great four-dimensional sphere." *

His voice was filled with equal portions of contempt and pity.

"Einstein has things slightly twisted. The universe is an *actual* sphere, the inside of which is an ultra-dimensional barrier. That is my universe!

"Thus, to enter one side is to *emerge* from the other side in the same direction—that is, to be removed from the point of entrance by the diameter of my spherical universe, which becomes non-existent because we cross the dimension rather than travel *along* its natural curve.

"You remember that Einstein's universe is extra-dimensional. In his universe, parallel lines meet—so do they in mine. The universes are so similar, I suspect, that Einstein was trying to say exactly what I have said!

"And now," he went on, pride puffing out his wrinkled cheeks, "since I knew that Nature had created an end

* There is an important analogy between our space, and a sphere. What happens to a straight line drawn on the surface of a sphere? It continues on until it comes back to its starting point. It cannot, so to speak, go on forever. Eventually it comes to its own other end. The curvature of the sphere on which it is drawn eventually bends it completely around. Thus it is with space, says Einstein. Space is in reality, a super sphere, perhaps not in the Euclidian sense of geometry, but in a hyper-sense, so that although space seems to us to be infinite, it really is no more so than a sphere seems infinite to a Flatlander. Thus, a straight line (straight to our conception) is really curved, and eventually returns (via this hyper-curved space) to its starting point.—Ed.

of space, I saw no reason why I couldn't, too. Watch!"

He bounced up from his chair. He approached the black wall of nothingness. He took a yellow pencil from his pocket. Dramatically, he began to push it into the blackness. He pushed it halfway in.

"It disappears!" cried Braun, looking at Stanton for appreciation.

Stanton watched, his eyes showing his interest.

Braun suddenly drew the pencil back, handed it to Stanton. Stanton looked at it, frowning. The pencil was cleanly sheared off to the point where it had been immersed.

Braun began to laugh again.

"Ho, ho, ho! You wonder where it has gone!"

He stopped laughing, came hobbling across the room toward Stanton, spreading his hands.

"Who knows how far away it is? All the way across the universe, trillions of light years. For this artificial end of space I have created with my machine is now an actual end of space.

"It operates in conjunction with an equal area of the end of space which it is facing, and to which it is parallel. If our voyager were to pierce the limit which faces and is parallel to this limit, he would emerge from this limit. And conversely! That is where half of that pencil went. It is on the other side of the universe, by crossing it, rather than traveling along its curve."

"Holy Smoke!" said Stanton, startled. "This is the road the first explorers of interstellar space will take."

"Ho!" ejaculated Braun. "What nonsense! For how would they get back, unless they went clear across the inside of that super universe? For my artificial end of space is located between the natural ends of space in which our universe is enclosed." *

He watched Stanton turning the sheared pencil over and over in his hands, looking at it thoughtfully. He was pleased with himself today. His indigestion was gone, even his rheumatism. He was happy, because his work was being appreciated.

But could he have looked ten minutes into the future—it was now twenty-two minutes past noon—he would have found himself face to face with death, because, as foreman of a jury, he had handed down a verdict of guilty in the case of Razetti vs. The State . . .

III

THIRTY-TWO MINUTES PAST NOON

HE looked with fading, terrified eyes into the mouth of the weapon Razetti held trained on his pot-belly. He could feel his stomach turning sick with acid. He could feel the aches returning to his joints.

He didn't want to die. Not because he was a coward—no. But because he knew he had something great to give the world.

"Go away!" he implored falteringly. "Go away, Razetti. You mustn't kill

* This new conception of Braun's is really very simple. Visualize for yourself a large rubber ball. You take a ladies' hatpin and stick it in one side of the ball (this is to illustrate what Professor Braun did with the pencil). You have shoved it through the curve of the universe, the universe in this instance being the rubber shell of the ball, and the point of it is now inside the ball, in the space Braun calls the hyper-universe. Don't forget that our universe in this analogy is the rubber shell of the ball itself, and nothing else. So, in order to bring the point of the hatpin back into our own universe, and onto its surface (the outside of the ball) we must push it all the way through the interior of the ball, and out through the rubber opposite where you first stuck the pin into it. Now, once again, the pin is "in" our own universe, and if we travel around the curve of the ball, we find the pin, although greatly distant from us by the extent of our entire universe. In other words, on the other side of our own universe.—Ea.

me. Someday, when I get it, I'll give you a million dollars. Yes, I will!"

He stopped in horror as he saw that Razetti was just smiling at him amiably.

"I been in prison ten years," he pointed out, "and you try to talk me out of paying you off. Why, you ain't got enough dough to put you in the brackets, let alone a million. Now shut up—or say your prayers."

Razetti shook his head. His eyes were blurring. He had time to marvel how wonderfully steady the gun in his hand was. Across the room, between the bodies of his victims, he could see the reflection of his own back.

Or, at least, it *looked* like his back! For the first time, he was beginning to think that it wasn't. He was beginning to feel that maybe there were people beyond that mirror, people who could . . .

His mind began to dwell on the strangeness of those mirrors. Now he was noticing another queer thing—his reflection, as well as that of Braun and Stanton, was located on the wrong end of the reflection! If that *was* a mirror, then his reflection should show up on the other side of the room as reflected in the mirror.

The whole room was reflected just the way it appeared to the eye. It wasn't turned around at all, as it should be.

And the mirrors didn't reflect themselves; where the mirrors should be—in the reflections—there were just walls of black emptiness.

His thoughts became jumbled. He shook his head.

"Whew!" he muttered. "Are them mirrors, or ain't they, you old buzzard?"

Stanton broke in before Braun could speak.

"You've got so much dope in you, you don't even know how to find out," he

said disinterestedly.

"Huh. I ain't got enough, is what you mean." He said jeeringly, "I guess you want me to turn around and touch one. Huh!"

He grinned nastily. He started backing up toward the mirror behind him, keeping the gun steady. He was determined to find out about this, how these mirrors could reflect things backward.

The time was thirty-three minutes past noon. Had Razetti been able to look a mere eleven minutes into the past, he would have heard the explanation; though, doubtless, he wouldn't have been able to understand it . . .

IV

TWENTY-TWO MINUTES PAST NOON

"ONE end of space," continued Braun, hobbling across the room to the other machine, "isn't going to do anybody any good at all. We need, for the purpose I wrote you about, an opposing end of space. You see!"

He pressed a button. An apparent mirror took form, stretching across the room. The wall of nothingness abruptly turned into another apparent mirror. Each showed a "reflection" exactly opposite to that which should have shown in a true mirror.

Braun's aged face was alight with a young enthusiasm.

"Follow the law," he chuckled. "Follow the law! Two ends of space, facing each other, parallel to each other. We have created a miniature universe in this very room. Light penetrates one end of space, emerges in the same direction from the other. I light a match—it is not a reflection you see. The light has simply curved around, ultra-dimensionally, from one end of our small universe to the other. And both

ends are right here in this room!"

Stanton nodded. "Um-huh." He began to walk back and forth before one "mirror."

Within the "reflection," he saw himself at the other side of the room! He saw that his pants sagged a little.

He turned around toward Braun, nodding quietly.

"I'm beginning to get it," he said respectfully. "You weren't kidding when you said this would revolutionize transportation."

Braun nodded excitedly. He rubbed his hands. "It will," he cried, "It will . . ."

He could hardly have been that certain if he had been able to look six minutes into the future . . .

V

THIRTY-THREE MINUTES PAST NOON

RAZETTI held the gun quite steady, as he moved backward. This, even though his eyes were blurring; even though things were rather hazy to his drug-starved mind. It didn't occur to him that his eyes were *not* blurring.

But he was laughing cagily at Stanton, because Stanton had thought his lack of morphine had robbhed him of coherent thought. He was going to kill Stanton, all right—and Braun, too. He only wanted to satisfy his curiosity first.

He moved back inch by inch. Mostly he wanted to make sure that his blur-filled eyes saw those flukey reflections. He wanted to make sure, before he consummated his third and fourth—or was it his fourth and fifth?—killings, that there might not actually be people in there, that that wasn't another room, just like this one. The odds, of course, were far against their being people, because he plainly saw the reflections of Stanton's and Braun's faces.

But who was he to take a chance? Not Razetti.

He watched his own reflection. He was relieved. It was moving back at just the rate he was moving hack. Toward him, of course, but that was natural for a flukey reflection.

Because he fixed his eyes on that reflection, he could not see the mirror behind him. So he didn't know that his back should have touched it. He kept inching back.

Suddenly he saw something that made his blood turn cold.

He saw now that a very clever trick had been played on him.

For there *was* a room beyond what he had thought was a mirror! The proof of this was that there was a man coming out of it, his back facing Razetti.

At any moment, the man would turn around, and there would be a gun in his hand. And what about the men in the room behind him; behind the other mirror?

Surrounded!

After that, he acted coldly, concisely, swiftly. He smiled a twisted smile as he pressed the trigger, started to fire on the man who had his hack turned to Razetti.

At the same time, he started to scream. That *had* been a room behind him, too! And there *had* been people in *it*! Now they were firing at his hack, just as he was firing at the back of that man across the room.

He started to topple, still screaming, still pumping bullets out. He had the dying satisfaction of seeing that figure across the room toppling too, of seeing the blood spurting from his hack.

Then Razetti crumpled up, and did not notice that half of his body, from the waist up, lay on one side of the room, while the remaining half lay on the other side.

The reason he did not notice this was because he was dead—unintentional suicide, which he would not have committed had he been able to look seven minutes into the past. . . .

VI

TWENTY-SEVEN MINUTES PAST NOON

"THEN," said Stanton, "solid objects should act in the same way as light waves, shouldn't they?"

Braun cried, "Certainly, certainly! I'll show you, Stanton. I give you my word I won't lose my hand!"

Stanton shifted uncomfortably. "Okay," he said, "show me."

Then resolutely, Brown stuck one arm—his right—through a 'mirror.' The arm appeared across the room, emerging from the other 'mirror.' Stanton grinned foolishly as he crossed the room and extended his fingers. Braun cackled, grasped Stanton's hand and shook it. Stanton withdrew his own hastily. But the implications were immense.

"You see?" said Braun, stepping completely through the mirror. "In San Francisco, you can set up one end of space. In New York another. Fix them parallel to each other. Then—one step and you move from one side of the continent to another. Just as I have crossed the entire universe in this one room."

"The commerce of a nation, of a whole world," began Stanton. "What a thrill! I've got to try it!"

He stepped through one end of space, and, before he emerged, whole, his body had been divided equally between two sides of the room. It didn't hurt. There was no sensation.

He felt suddenly staggered with the possibilities. He started to sit down, to think this thing out when—

A LITTLE man was standing at the foot of the kitchen stairs, smiling amiably. In his hand was a snub-nosed automatic.

"Reach," he said, smiling, and moving into the room.

Stanton slowly drew himself upright, puzzledly raised his hands. He threw a look at Braun. Braun's hands were up. He was shaking with fright. Stanton had a hunch that Braun knew the reason for the intrusion of what Stanton knew instantly to be a dope-fiend. He said, "I don't get this."

Razetti said, "You will, big fella."

He quickly and carefully frisked the two of them. He made a jerking motion with the gun.

He moved backward slightly, his lips curled into a lop-sided grin. His eyes sought Braun's.

"Well, well!" he smiled. "It's too bad you have to die, ain't it?"

But if he had been able to look a mere three minutes into the future . . .



FANTASTIC HUMANS



By HERMAN E. KRIMMEL

Here are several examples of the strange humans known to science as the Idiots savants, the riddle of whose existence is a baffling one

In 1850, a fifteen year old boy named J. H. Pollen was admitted to the Earlewood Asylum for the insane and feeble minded. There was no question of his derangement and his inability to care for himself in the world of normal people. Yet during the threescore years he was confined, he produced ship models and wood-carvings of such marvelous craftsmanship that they aroused the admiration of professional artisans.

One of the steamship models he constructed was exhibited at the Fisheries Exhibition in 1863. The work of three years, it was complete and almost perfect in every detail with thirteen lifeboats, cabins furnished with beds and chairs all made by Pollen.

This was just one of the many remarkable works of a man who was representative of that strange group of people known as idiots savants; people whose intelligence is frequently so low that they are unable to eat or dress without aid but who, nevertheless, excel even the brilliant in some single accomplishment.

Dr. Howe reported one such idiot who, given a man's age, could instantly calculate the number of minutes he had lived.

And there was a seventeen year old lad who was unable to understand the dial of a clock but who could, nevertheless, tell almost to the minute the time of day.

A boy of twelve could multiply three figures by three others without error and faster than you or I could perform the same calculation on an electric adding machine, yet he could not be taught to read or write.

A man named "Blind Tom," a hopeless mental defective, could reproduce on the piano any tune after hearing it only once and, still more remarkable, could play two compositions simultaneously. Of course, he could not read a note of music. And Dr. Martin Barr reported the somewhat similar case of a young man who, of his own accord, could speak only a few simple words but could repeat with faultless accent everything said

to him, not only in his native, but in any language.

The asylum at Armentiers once housed an idiot named Fleury who was studied by Dr. L. Lettre. Fleury could mentally square any four digit number in about four seconds, and cube a number of six figures in about six seconds.

He was asked how many grains of corn there would be in each of sixty-four boxes if one grain was in the first, two in the second, four in the third, eight in the fourth, and so on in geometric progression. Unhesitatingly he gave the correct answers for the fourteenth (8,912), the eighteenth (131,072), and the twenty-fourth (8,388,608). Within six seconds he had calculated the number in the forty-eighth box and within forty-five seconds he gave the correct total of grains in the entire 64 boxes.

You or I would take hours obtaining that answer on paper yet Fleury was able to say in less than a minute that it is 18,446,734,073,700,551,-613.

Dr. Langdon Down reported the case of a boy who could recite pages of the most difficult reading matter after seeing it only once. Once when experimenting with this case, an accident occurred illustrating the truly fantastic character of these mental aberrations. He was reciting a chapter from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and he skipped a line on the third page. He promptly relaxed his steps to include this line but he never recited that chapter thereafter without repeating the same error and following the identical procedure of self correction.

Perhaps the most famous of the idiots savants was a cretin imbecile named Gottfried Mind who died in Berne in 1814. Sometimes called the Katzen Raphael he acquired a European reputation for his splendid water colors of animals and groups of children. King George IV bought one of his paintings.

Psychologists have been baffled by the phenomenon of the idiots savants. It is rare, of course, but it still leads to fascinating speculation on the faint line dividing genius from idiocy and insanity.

DR. GARY HORNE'S first thought was that he had got himself projected to the ceiling of the lecture auditorium.

From where he was standing, his incredulous eyes looked down at the distinguished audience of scientists and physicists.

He blinked, then, and his gaze scanned the auditorium within the lecture hall into which he himself had been transported. It was similar to the larger chamber, but everything in it appeared to be in reverse.

The audience in this inner auditorium was below him, instead of above. Whatever sort of platform he was on appeared to be at the top of a pyramid that rose from the floor inside in tiers. This second ceiling was a half dome that arched down from ten feet above his head to the rear of the inner hall. And everything within the second chamber was tinted a delicate blue, opaque, yet with a suggestion of depth to it.

Amazement shot through Horne's features as he stared down at the inside audience of at least a hundred persons, who returned his gaze with the same startled expression. They were of both sexes, the men wearing short, vestlike coats over collarless shirts, and very full trousers which ended above their ankles. The women were dressed in brilliant tunics over white, long skirts. All of them wore thin metal bands about their foreheads.

It came to Horne then that he had been carried somehow to another country. It seemed both possible and logical. His mind leaped at the conjecture that he had been brought here after his injury in the laboratory, that these men and women were specialists who were trying to repair the damage done.

Yes, that must be it. For Gary

The WORLD IN THE ATOM

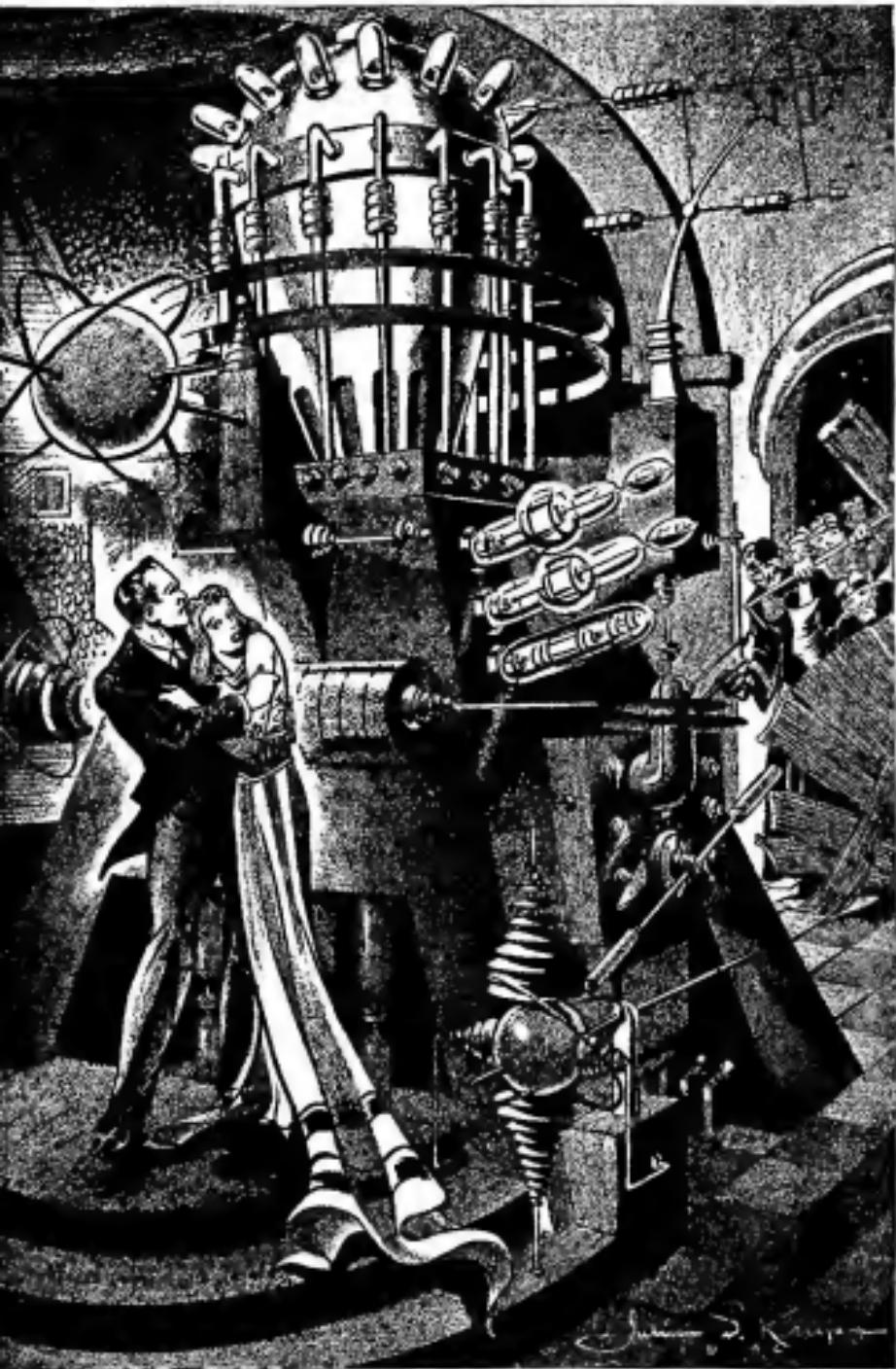
by Ed Earl Redd

**Gary Horne knew only a vast
flare of light, then he found
himself in a strange world in an
atom of the element Thorium**

Horne knew he had just been through an experience out of which he ought not to have emerged alive.

He had been lecturing here in the California Institute of Technology. Then had come the climax of his address—an actual experiment in which an atom would be smashed and its internal secrets revealed on the electron-magnifying screen which was the crowning point of his scientific career.

His gray eyes sparkling with his inner excitement, Gary Horne had stepped up to the intricate, almost men-



Gary Morse clutched Thale and thrust her behind him as the door crashed inward

acing mechanism which he had devised, thrown the switch—and six million volts had smashed through a thorium atom.

And then Horne had begun to glow with a green luminosity! Horrible and unearthly he had glowed, while the hall full of scientists sat transfixed, until a final flash of violet brilliance coursed through his body—and then *Gary Horne disappeared entirely*. . . .

He rubbed his eyes now and studied the strangely different men and women in his new inner world.

Their arms and legs were noticeably longer than that of any other human being he had ever seen. The arms were perhaps six inches longer, the legs proportionately attenuated. Now, as Horne looked at them, he could see other differences. Thinner features, glossier hair, more slender bodies. Suddenly a fear gripped him. Who were these people? And—*where was he?*

As if in answer to his unspoken question, a voice said:

"We have brought you here, man of the Seventh Plane, for retribution. We are those you sought to destroy."

Horne shot a startled look around him. Though he was certain the voice had come to him from his very side, yet there was no one nearer than the watchers below, who were at least forty feet from him! He forced down his amazement and replied:

"I—I'm afraid I don't understand."

He seemed to hear laughter from the audience below. Certainly he saw their faces relax in smiles. Out of the crowd a young woman stepped. An older man, tall, dark, severe joined her. The girl's voice, the same one he had heard before, rang again in his mind.

"Your petty divisions do not concern us, O man. To us, you are Gary Horne—of the Seventh Plane."

"Seventh Plane!" Horne repeated in

surprise. His mind was a confused, bewildered hodge-podge of conjecture. What ungodly mystery did all this cloak?

Suspiciously he glanced about him. He noticed that the small, square platform on which he stood was littered with what appeared to be electrical apparatus. There were gigantic vacuum tubes, glittering silver coils, bars of some transparent green stuff that looked more like metal than glass. But even at a glance he could see that things were in disorder. From several bits of equipment smoke arose slowly. Some of the tubes were shattered.

Now he looked back to the girl. Tensely he started toward her down the long stretch of bluish steps. He realized he was lighter, for some reason. He had a little difficulty controlling his stride, for there seemed to be springs in his shoes. When he had come quite close to the girl, he stopped and stared intently at her features.

SHE was quite beautiful. Only the long arms and legs differentiated her from any other lovely girl he had ever known. Her face was smooth and healthfully colored, but showed no trace of cosmetics on the glowing cheeks and red lips. Her eyes were of deep sapphire that glowed with an inner fire of alertness. Her nose was thin and finely chiseled. She wore a lustrous gold tunic fastened around her waist by a wide belt of transparent red links. The skirt that fell in graceful folds to her small feet was white, like the skirts worn by all the women in the assemblage. But through her own skirt ran tiny threads of gold that caused it to shimmer brilliantly when the light struck it at a certain angle. Horne gazed at the girl with wonder and admiration. She smiled.

"Is it possible, Gary Horne," she

asked slowly, "that you do not know where you are?"

"I confess," Horne replied positively, "that I have no more idea of where I am than I have of how you can understand and speak my language."

The girl started to answer, but before her words came to the young scientist, the man at her side broke in rudely,

"Your Majesty, is it necessary that we talk with this creature? But an hour ago he attempted to plunge our universe to its doom. Hardly a year ago he destroyed the constellation Gira, slaughtering its teeming millions at a stroke. Need we say more to him than —death!"

Horne started as the word grated on his senses. He took swift inventory of the speaker. The man was tall and cadaverous, with a spindly chest and thin neck. His face was swarthy, his hair black, his eyes sharp as acid. Beneath a long nose his lips were thin and bloodless.

Abruptly, Horne blurted, "I don't know what you people are or why you seem to regard me as a criminal. I don't even know what kind of place this is supposed to be. But I do know there is no such constellation as 'Gira,' which I am accused of having destroyed. And as for trying to demolish the universe—you forget that it would annihilate me as well as you!"

A swift, puzzled look passed between the man and the girl. Horne heard a murmur from the large body of watchers who sat forward, tensely listening to them. Then, as he waited for a reply, a bright beam of sunlight glanced through the window into the domed room. He squinted as its rays struck full in his face. But somehow it did not seem as bright as usual. In the next moment he sprang to the window and peered out.

He staggered back as though he had

been struck a physical blow. For this was not the sun he was looking at. This was some strange solar body, small and red instead of gigantic and yellow!

Horne whirled to face the assembly. "In God's name," he cried, "where am I?"

The girl said clearly then, "You are on one of the worlds you have sought to destroy. You are on the planet Thoria, of the Fifth Plane. In your own language, Gary Horne, you are on an atom-world!"

CHAPTER II

The Crystal

FOR a long moment the words seemed to have no particular meaning for the young physicist. Atom-world—there was no such thing! There was the solar system and the universe, and there were thousands of other universes even larger than his own. But atom universes!

Finally Gary Horne asked hoarsely, "Tell me—what's happened to bring me here? Who are you people, and—and—?"

The cadaverous leader beside the girl crossed his thin arms.

"I am Jaro, Workmaster of Thoria; the woman—our Queen. Your own bloodthirstiness brought you here. When, one year ago, you sent out your cowardly rays into our universe, you utterly destroyed the constellation Gira. It is known for certain, that many of the planets revolving about the seven suns of the constellation were inhabited. How many millions of souls you blasted out of existence when you exploded those planets will never be known.

"We resolved at that time that the crime should not go unpunished. From that time until this, we have labored to find a means of destroying your own universe. But that has not been possi-

ble as yet. Still, we were able to send out a feeble ray of our own, which fused with yours and caused your downfall. The force exerted by our combined efforts was sufficient to transfer you from your own Seventh Plane to ours—the Fifth."

"These 'Planes' you speak of," Horne frowned. "What are they?"

"The Fifth Plane," the other said, "is that five stages removed from the ultimate in micro-finity. In other words, between our universes there are two stages. There is Thoria, our planet, and there is our atom-universe—which is the Sixth Plane. Your own planet, whatever it may be, is the Seventh Plane; your universe the Eighth. Five stages below us is the point beyond which matter ceases to exist."

Horne was silent, trying to grasp the fact that he had been shrunk in a fraction of a second to atomic size. It was impossible—and yet it had happened. He himself was now no more than an infinitesimal speck on the surface of one of the invisible atoms he had been trying to shatter in his laboratory for so many months. He was alive and breathing, yet he was small enough to walk on one of the electrons revolving about the nucleus of a thorium atom.

The thought staggered Horne. It had been considered impossible before for a man to grasp the size of an atom, other than mathematically. A grim smile touched his lips as he thought how much more difficult it was to realize that he, Gary Horne, was approximately one-billionth the size of an electron!

Suddenly another thought came to him. Earnestly he tried to reassure his listeners.

"Had I known it was lives I was toying with, instead of ultra-microscopic bits of matter, I should never have attempted my experiments. Why, to me it was just as though I should take a bit

of dust from this very floor and try to shatter it!"

He spread his hands and smiled. The explanation, he felt, was an apt one.

A gasp went up from the assemblage. The dark-faced leader glowered at the girl.

"Thala," he said crisply, "have we need of more proof than this? By his own lips you have had admission that he is capable of blasting the Fourth and Third Planes into elemental micro-finity!"

Thala looked surprised, and then angry. "Enough!" she said. "Take him to the crystal!"

Horne stepped forward and argued, "If I've made a slip, I apologize. I was merely trying to impress on you—"

He stopped then. Any further talk was obviously futile. Especially since, he realized abruptly, their speech had been by mental impulses. Not a lip had moved even once!

FOUR men closed in on him then. Suddenly one of them made a quick movement and tried to encircle him with his long arms. In the next moment the scientist exploded into action.

His right hand, powered by sturdy shoulder muscles, ripped up into the guard's face, hurling him to the floor. Gary Horne pivoted and swung a vicious roundhouse left into another man's chest. The breath left the second guard's body in a gasp as he sagged to his knees. Now the husky young physicist shot through the opening he had cleared and headed for the door.

Jaro, the evil-visaged Workmaster, sprang into his path and attempted to drag him down. Horne employed a very efficient Earthly boxing ruse as he closed with the man. His left hand pulled back low, as though to drive into his groin. Jaro flinched and dropped his hands over his stomach to protect him-

self. In a flash Horne's knotted right hand smashed into the other's jaw and flung him out of the way.

The large audience of men and women rose up with angry shouts and scrambled to intercept him, their thin faces distorted with rage. Long arms reached out to hold him, but his legs, accustomed to a stronger gravitational pull, catapulted him past. He reached the door and sprang through.

Horne's chest heaved with his exertions as he swept his eyes over the scene before him. He was on a balcony over a deep canyon. The crevasse looked a mile deep to him. On all sides, cylindrical structures, faintly colored, sprang into the air for hundreds of feet. He had a glimpse of a futuristic-looking city, spanned with slender bridges and paved with tinted highways, clustering the banks of the canyon, and then he saw the bridge off to his left. Instinctively he ran toward it.

It was only about ten feet wide. Gary Horne could see it spanned the quarter-mile wide canyon in a graceful, curving arch, to disappear into a building on the other side. Hastily he sprang up its sloping runway. He could hear feet pounding close behind him, and suddenly a series of popping sounds. About him the air seemed to be exploding with angry bursts that tossed him from side to side.

It was difficult to keep his footing as the explosions came closer and threw him this way and that. Suddenly his feet were knocked neatly from under him. He sprawled on his back and skidded across the slippery runway. Too late he saw his danger.

He had a brief glimpse of the edge of the bridge as it approached altogether too fast, and then his body struck a guard-rail support and he was toppling over the side into the crevasse! His eyes distended with terror as he found

himself hurtling toward the far-off canyon floor. The air commenced to whistle past his ears in a screaming crescendo.

Suddenly Horne jerked to a stop. His whole body ached from the jarring impact of striking a solid floor. He was dimly conscious, as a spinning void closed in on him, of lying on a slab of glass over empty space. Then consciousness left him.

* * *

A STABBING headache brought Gary Horne awake once more. He sat up feebly and looked about. He was lying on a cold floor in a small, circular room with light coming in from all sides through glass walls. Glancing out into the scene beyond the room, he knew he must be at the top of some building. He could make out the tops of one or two structures, but nothing more. Slowly he got to his feet and looked about him.

A gleaming shaft was the nearest thing to furniture in the room. It rose, a black, fluted column, out of the floor and ended just short of the flat glass ceiling. Horne supposed it was an elevator shaft, for he saw no stairs. The walls were round and smooth and perfectly transparent, the floor of black glass. But there was not a chair or a bed or any other bit of furniture in the whole cell.

Painfully he made his way to the wall and stared down. He saw now that he had been brought to the very top of the building. This, then, must be the Thorian equivalent of a dungeon.

All Horne's fears dropped from him at the sight he had barely glimpsed before, on the bridge. He had never seen anything so magnificent, so beautiful, so completely unearthly as the sight that met his startled gaze.

The Thorian city lay at least a half

mile below him. Through the very center of the cylindrical, columnlike buildings ran a wide canyon that was as majestic as the dream of a master architect. On its banks were clustered the hundred-odd shining structures that composed the city.

From his view high above them, they appeared to Horne as large as dollars at their flat tops, and as small as dimes at their bases. Many of them clung to the very brink of the chasm.

Across the canyon itself stretched numerous thin, arching bridges. Some of them sprang from halfway up buildings to cross into other structures. The streets appeared like twisting ribbons of various colors. Color appeared to be the order of the day in this little electron-world. Every building was shaded from some deep tone at its base to a pastel shade at the very crown. The entire effect was one of sheer loveliness.

Faintly visible from Horne's lofty vantage point were the teeming thousands that came and went on the streets far below. It came home to Gary Horne with force, as he gazed down into the city, that it was a terrible thing he had done. With one deafening crash of electricity he had often scattered these microscopic civilizations through the infinite depths of space. He had slaughtered on an atomic scale millions of men as important in their own lives as he was in his!

With a bitter sigh the young scientist turned to look about his little circular apartment. A gasp parted his lips as he realized he was no longer alone. The elevator door was ajar, and in the rectangular entrance stood Thala, Queen of Thoria.

"I have been listening to you, Gary Horne," she smiled, all trace of animosity erased from her countenance. "Your words please me."

"Listening?" Horne begun. Then he

realized that what she had been hearing was his thoughts. It gave him an unpleasant, uncanny feeling. Nor did it put him any more at ease to realize he was "hearing" only the thoughts she wanted him to hear.

"Your words please me," Thala had said.

HORNE started from his reverie, smiled a little bleakly.

"How can that be, O Queen"—that was the proper form of address, he knew—"when only a short while ago I was ordered here for 'saying' things that your people detested?"

"The thoughts in the Council Room were many," Thala replied. "Perhaps I became confused and sentenced you unfairly. At any rate, I am convinced by the things you have just said that you did not intend to destroy Gira."

"Please believe me, I didn't!" Horne said earnestly. "If I had had the slightest suspicion of what I was doing, nothing in the world could have made me do it."

A troubled frown crossed Thala's smooth forehead. She looked away. Horne's eyes appraised her interestedly as she gazed through the transparent wall over the far-off atomic horizon.

Though she appeared to be not more than twenty-three or twenty-four, there was a grave, serene quality of loveliness in her face unusual in so young a woman. Her dark blue eyes were deep and thoughtful, and yet sparkling and alive. Her rich lips were molded in firm lines. And there was a forceful set to her round little chin.

Gary Horne found himself wanting to kiss her, suddenly, without knowing why.

After a while he said quietly, "They call you 'Queen', do they not? Just what does that mean? Is the title passed on through a family line?"

"Many hundreds of years past it was," Thala told him. "Now the governing class is trained from birth. The children of all important persons in our world are instructed in all the things a ruler must know—science, psychology, economics, history, and so forth. At the age of twenty they undergo a rigid examination designed to weed out the less desirable."

"Ten are chosen from the entire group of thousands. The ten are graded, and upon the death of the present Emperor or Queen, the highest takes his or her place. I have been ruler for less than two years, myself."

"And this Jaro—who and what is he?"

"Jaro is the Workmaster. He is next in line should I die or be removed. It is my place to make decisions, his to see that they are executed. But sometimes I wonder—" Thala broke off, her face troubled.

WHILE they had been talking, the little red Thorian sun had been slipping fast toward the horizon. Lights flicked on now in many windows of the buildings below. All over the city tiny pinpoints sprang up as night dropped like a dark cloak over the strange little world. And suddenly, while they watched, it was dark.

Gary Horne, thinking thoughts that were far from scientific, blushed as the girl turned toward him. Her eyes were faintly luminous with the reflected light of the city, and they seemed to be smiling at him. He saw her teeth flash in a smile. Without knowing why, he took her hands in his. His pulse gave one wild beat at the soft touch of her skin.

Instantly he was confused and regretted his action. He withdrew his hand and said hastily:

"Getting—rather dark, isn't it? How do you turn on the lights in this room?"

Thala laughed softly, a low, tremulous laugh. It was the first actual sound Horne had ever heard her make.

She said: "You are a model prisoner, Gary Horne, one who remembers his place—even when a Queen is in danger of forgetting hers!"

Quickly she moved away. Through the darkness she glided to the elevator shaft. Her hand felt of its black, polished surface. After a moment of silence, the room blazed into light. The illumination came from the top of the shaft, shining upward to be reflected down from the ceiling.

Thala pressed another button of the four that were set in a square by the door, and part of the floor slid back, to reveal a bed set flush with the floor level in a space about ten feet square. Another button was pressed, to reveal a lavatory and shower below the floor level, with a short flight of stairs leading to it.

"Your food will be brought to you shortly," she said, "and after that you must sleep and rest. Tomorrow the Council of Five meets to decide what is to be done with you. I believe your story, and I may be able to persuade them to try to send you back to Earth, with your word not to repeat your crime. But I can promise you nothing. Jaro is powerful and he is against you. Nothing but extreme good fortune and my word over his will be of any avail."

Thala stepped into the car then and the sliding door slipped between them. The rush of air told the physicist he was alone once more.

CHAPTER III

The Canyon's Floor

TENSE expectancy charged the atmosphere of the council chamber

when Gary Horne was brought there early the next morning. Hardly had he finished the rather tasty breakfast they brought him when he was escorted down the building to the first level, along a high-vaulted hall, and into the chamber where the highest officials of Thoria sat in conference.

His two guards left him standing at the foot of a long center table and went out, leaving him face to face with the Council of Five. Horne catalogued the faces before him automatically.

The thin-faced, dark-eyed Jaro sat at Queen Thala's right. Open hostility burned in Jaro's gaze. The three other council members looked somewhat less hostile, but far from friendly. At Jaro's right hand sat a bald-headed, weak-chinned man whom Horne later learned was Harnak, Master of Shops. Over a loose, collarless shirt Harnak wore a deep purple vest. Across the table were the two other members, from whose very appearance the scientist could almost have guessed their occupations.

One of them was Vulkor, Master of Finance. His face was thin and shrewd, his eyes bright, small and pinched. The tightness of his pale lips denoted a careful, if not pessimistic, nature. He held a thin sliver of metal in his fingers and twisted it precisely, as though counting the revolutions it made.

His colleague was Od-ro, Master of Means. From his studious, analytical face, Horne half expected him to reel off yards of percentages, figures, and possibly the number of potatoes that could be grown in a cubic yard of soil.

After formal preliminaries, Gary Horne was instructed to give his defense. He told his story simply and lucidly, from the time he had commenced the study of matter until his final attempt to shatter the thorium atom. The faces before him were expressionless, but each Councilman was

busy with the slender stylus in his hand. Horne's judges were making long, jerky lines on the black cylinders before them. Undoubtedly they were taking notes.

Horne concluded earnestly, "You must realize that we of Earth are far behind the civilization of Thoria in scientific progress. We have no such concepts of the form of matter as you have reached. My sole motive, in splitting the atom, was to bring new wonders of science to my people."

"I never dreamt of the havoc created by my experiments, and those of other physicists. I can only pledge you my word that should you enable me to return to Earth, scientists will never again seek to smash the atom in order to obtain its secrets!"

WITH that he stepped back, with a tired little gesture.

Jaro turned to face Thala. The girl looked deeply moved and troubled by his words. Apparently she said something, for the Workmaster's face darkened. He turned quickly to face Harnak, beside him. The Master of Shops nodded in agreement. In turn the Workmaster fixed Vulkor and Od-ro with his piercing glance and communicated some thought-message to them. Both of them nodded confirmation.

Suddenly Thala leaped to her feet. She threw her stylus on the table in exasperation. One after another she faced the Councilmen, her eyes blazing, her cheeks glowing with anger. At last she leaned forward, her hands resting on the table, and seemed to be telling them off scathingly. Then she stopped, stood up straight and waited with queenly assurance for their replies.

Vulkor, wizened little atomic financier, laid his stylus down and faced the girl. Hurriedly Jaro struck the table with his fist and nodded positively. He took up the argument and drove home

bis points with blows of the fist on the table-top. For a full minute he harangued this girl who stood out against four hostile men.

There was a taut silence after he concluded. Od-ro, Vulkor, Harnak and Jaro glared at her angrily, a challenge in their eyes. After a long time she shrugged and stood up. Gary Horne felt the mental barrier drop as she spoke.

"The Council has decided, Earthman," she informed him. "Your crime has been deemed one atonable only by extermination of your entire world. You yourself will not be harmed. You are to be made to help us develop a machine powerful enough to achieve our purpose. After that you will be returned—to live alone among the ruins of Earth!"

GARY HORNE went rigid. The awful import of the sentence was something that no man could realize. He licked his lips and stared mutely at those accusing faces, at the eyes that glared coldly at him.

"The ruins of Earth!" his mind echoed. It was inconceivable to him—his entire world to be blasted into destruction as he had unwittingly exterminated other worlds. But that had been unintentional. This was mass murder!

All of a sudden Horne stalked to the council table, white with rage.

"Are you barbarians or super-intelligent human beings? My mistake was one anyone could have made. Yet you treat me like a criminal and insist the entire Earth must suffer for my crime. Is that Thorian justice?" His intent, angry face was fixed on Jaro's acid visage.

"Well, you can go plumb to hell!" Gary Horne stormed, with natural Earthly emphasis. "You won't get any help from me. You can torture me or kill me—but it won't do you a damned bit of good!"

"Torture will be quite unnecessary," Jaro smiled. "You see—we are going to make use of your knowledge right now! You will be shown our apparatus, which is somehow inferior to the one you yourself developed. When you find the flaw in our work, your mind will immediately register it. And in that instant we, too, will know where we have been wrong!"

Despair clutched Horne's heart. Jaro's words were true. They would read his deductions in exactly the same way they had read his mind—

Jaro stood up and with mock politeness bowed to Thala.

"Perhaps Her Majesty would like to lead the way. I can think of no more gracious guide for our prisoner."

The girl's face was stormy, but she controlled herself. Ignoring the Councilmen, she joined Horne and led him through the door.

"In some ways," she said, as they passed down the long hall, followed by the Masters, "I wonder just how superior our civilization is!"

At the far end of the corridor they emerged into a broad balcony which formed the runway for one of the slender bridges that spanned the canyon. On all sides rose the towering city. At the other side of the canyon Thala led the way to one of the elevators. When all were inside it, Jaro depressed a button with his foot, and the car shot downward with rushing speed. Roads and bridges flashed by them as they hurtled thousands of feet down from the surface of the canyon. Suddenly Jaro let his foot up and the car came to a gradual stop.

They emerged into the bottom of the canyon. The section they were in had appeared, from above, to be open, but now the young physicist realized it had a great glass dome above it. To left and right were masses of machinery,

operated by workmen in their colorful costumes. Each man seemed to be turning out some one article. Beyond the machines was a small circular space closed off by semi-transparent green glass. It was roofless, like the rest of the place, but Horne knew from a glance that it must be the point where all this activity was centered.

Now Jaro turned to the left and motioned them into a doorway. The room Horne entered was small. It consisted of nothing but shelf after shelf of small black cylinders, like the ones he had seen in the council room. In the center was a table with a metal box on it, a silver sphere atop the box.

Harnak, Master of Shops, informed him with a leer,

"It is here your work will be done, Earthman. On these disks is recorded every phase of the work we are doing. Here—put this on and sit in that chair." He took a metal circlet from a shelf.

The young scientist frowned. The metal ring seemed to be the same as those the others wore about their foreheads. He had thought before that they were simply ornaments. The little collar slipped on smoothly, pressing rather sharply into the temples.

Harnak selected a disk and placed it inside the box. He pressed a button. In the next moment the shining sphere was seen to vibrate. Gary Horne found that a stream of ideas was forming in his mind. A look of amazement overspread his features as the device commenced to explain, in simple thought-impulses, the entire story of the invention.

IT was like speech without sound. It seemed to Horne more that he was thinking these things out than that they were being told to him. For several minutes he sat there in silent wonder. Around him the four Masters hung

tensely, reading his every thought.

Suddenly something seemed to jar on him. The impulse-disk had said clearly,

"A temperature of nearly seventeen hundred degrees is created by the arc which condenses these electrical impulses. Therefore we must use copper, as our most heat-resisting metal."

In spite of himself Gary Horne started. Through his mind, before he could stop the flow of outraged scientific impulses, ran the objection:

"Copper! Why, that will melt far below that point! You'll get one good flash of juice and then it'll be over. The only metal you can use is platinum!"

A glad cry broke from Jaro's lips. He turned to Harnak.

"You hear!" he exulted. "There is a metal which will resist such heat! And fortunately," he said more intensely, turning to Thala, "Her Majesty is able to help us."

Horne was suddenly amazed to find himself interpreting all these thought-impulses passing between the Masters and Thala. The mystery of the metal bands they wore was solved! Without them these rulers were probably as unresponsive as their Earth prisoners. Only their unusual powers of concentration had been able to make him "hear" without one.

Impulsively Queen Thala's hand went to her forehead, touched the slender metal ribbon which encircled it.

"But this time it is in my power to refuse!" she said triumphantly. "The circlet I wear belongs solely to the Queen. In that circlet is contained all the platinum Thoria holds. The Council of Five has no power to take it from me!"

Consternation flushed the Masters' faces. Od-ro, shrewd Master of Means, stepped closer to the girl.

"But you cannot refuse!" he argued

bodily. "Our electroscopes have proved no other source of platinum exists on this planet, save the one that yielded the metal you wear. Thala—you are commanded to sacrifice your circlet!"

CHAPTER IV

The Way Back

A BRUPTLY hatred seared Gary Horne's brain. Hatred for these overhearing tyrants who were not fit to rule became in him a live thing. With the speed of thought he sprang forward and flung his arm into Jaro's chest, knocking him out of the way.

In a flash Horne was at the girl's side. As though she knew what he wanted, she slipped the little band of metal out of her lustrous dark hair and handed it to him. Gripping it tightly in his hand, he turned and charged into Vulkor and Od-ro, who were blocking his path to the rear door. They were tugging inside their loose shirts, trying to free the weapons they had stopped him with before.

But Horne was not to be frustrated so easily this time. His strength was greater than theirs and he was burning to use it. With a growl of anger he seized Od-ro by the neck and flung him against the wall. A cascade of disks shattered from the shelves. Horne picked the wizened Vulkor up bodily and flung him out the main door into the laboratory. A hulhous pistol-like affair clattered on the floor from the ruler's limp hand.

Horne turned to the table and raised the boxlike amplifier, whirled to heave it into the onrushing Harnak's face. He saw his first glimpse of Thorian blood as the atomic scientist went down. Blood gushed from smashed nose and lips in a scarlet flood that stained the white shirt.

In the next moment Horne upended the table in Jaro's path and darted out the rear door into the corridor. Side entrances flashed past him as he ran swiftly into the less populated sections of the workshops. He sped straight down the hall for a hundred yards or so, then cut briskly to the right and up another hall. Sounds of pursuit echoed faintly. He reached a fork in the corridor, hesitated. Then he shot on to the right until he came to a flight of stairs.

Gary Horne sprang up them swiftly. Suddenly, as he reached a landing, an elevator door loomed up before him. Hurriedly he pressed the button and waited impatiently. There was a rushing sound after a moment, and the elevator door slid aside. Horne entered and closed it. He was on the point of pressing the button that would take him up, when he reflected that would carry him directly into the heart of the city. His forefinger touched the "down" button, which he recognized by its inverted arrow.

With a surge the car dropped. Five seconds passed, ten. Gary Horne held his breath and hoped the mechanism had an automatic stopping device. But perhaps this one was different! After a full minute, he decided he must be far enough down to be safe at least for a few hours. He found a red, unmarked button and pressed it. The car stopped rather suddenly, and the pressure on his stomach made him gag a bit.

It was almost dark when Gary Horne emerged into a hall. What little light there was, came from a dusty illuminator-globe. He went down the hall as far as he could see anything. In the shadows he discovered a door. He found a match and struck it. By its feeble, flickering flame Horne saw that the room beyond was small, dusty and unused. Gratefully he passed inside and

prepared for a long wait.

He made himself fairly comfortable in a corner where it was pitch dark and fell into a troubled sleep.

* * *

HOURS later Horne awoke with a start. But not a sound was to be heard. Rubbing his eyes, he got to his feet and stretched cramped muscles. Then he made his way cautiously back to the elevator and reascended. A plan was taking definite form in his mind.

In the inner auditorium in which he had first stepped into this strange atomic universe, there must still remain the devilish apparatus with which Jaro had hoped to destroy Earth; the apparatus which had been partially wrecked when the force of its atomic potential fused with that of his own atom-smashing machine in the University lecture hall. It had been this fusion which had projected Gary Horne into this other world.

Now, Horne thought, if he could steal the parts necessary to repair the device, he might be able to transport himself back to Earth—and take with him that precious bit of platinum which alone stood between this bizarre atomic Plane and the people of his own world!

Heart pounding with excitement, the young scientist returned to the dome-ceilinged auditorium by way of the elevator and the bridge. Eagerly he shoved the wide door to the chamber ajar and slid inside. It was quite dark, and Horne decided to risk a match. His fingers found one in his pocket—

And at that moment, a voice froze him in his tracks.

"You are most indiscreet, Earthman!"

GARY HORNE whirled to face the indistinct shape near him.

"Thala!" he breathed. "What—what brought you here?"

"The knowledge that you would re-

turn to the machine that carried you from Earth," she said simply. "I knew return would be in your thoughts, so—I came." Her slight figure was close to him.

Without quite knowing where he found the courage, Gary Horne suddenly took the girl in his arms and pressed his lips to her own. A long moment they held each other, and in Thala's eyes was a light that shines in the eyes of all women when they are in love—

The Queen drew away presently, her cheeks rosy and her breath a little tremulous.

"We must hurry," she said quickly. "After that there will be time for—things of the heart. Here, there is constant danger of your being discovered. I have brought food that you may work while you study the machine."

He thanked her with his eyes.

"These tubes, Thala." Gary Horne gestured at the apparatus. "They seem to be the only part damaged. Probably their filaments were made of copper and could not withstand the heat generated. But I think if we replace these tubes the machine will work!"

The girl nodded eagerly. "I can bring them tomorrow."

"Fine! I knew you would." Then he remembered something.

He took the platinum band from his pocket and handed it to Thala.

"I wouldn't want to be caught with this," he said. "Your associates wouldn't like it a bit."

The girl smiled appreciatively. She removed the silver band she had been wearing and donned the platinum one.

"This little silver band," Horne said, "might turn out to be a good decoy—just in case."

Outside, the faint shuffling of feet made them both start. Wordlessly, poignantly the Queen nodded. Horne

said no more. He turned his back and made quickly for the door. In a matter of moments he was gone.

Could he have been two places at once, he would have seen the girl staring out a window in the large chamber. And there were tears in her eyes.

CHAPTER V

The Final Hour

THROUGH bridge and elevator Gary Horne made his way back to his underground retreat. He slumped down in a corner, but for hours was unable to relax. Thoughts of Thala, of this strange new world, of the cruelty of its rulers, of the dire necessity to rescue Earth from an incredible fate marched across his brain. Finally sleep claimed him again for the second time in a relatively few hours.

But an exhausted mind is no mind at all, and finally the young scientist forced himself not to think. . . .

When he awoke he felt oddly refreshed. Had he slept too long, Horne wondered. Anxiously he hurried along the dark corridor to the elevator, rocketed up from the depths and again stepped across the bridge.

It was still dark outside. He must have slept the clock around.

Warily Horne crept along the guard-rail. Faint light shone through the windows of the auditorium. Thala must be there waiting for him!

He would surprise her, come through the window. He leaned against the railing for a second and caught his breath. As if that had been a signal, a dazzling burst of light sprayed over him from a dozen different directions, to impale him helplessly against the wall!

Terror knifed his heart. He crouched, frozen into immobility. Abruptly, a sound behind him made him spin about.

"The sharp eyes of Vulkor were right, Earthman," Jaro said exultantly. "It was you indeed whom he saw leave the auditorium last night. Her Majesty must have been mistaken, in saying she had been alone there."

Out of the darkness beyond the pale of light the Workmaster strode, flanked by Vulkor and Harnak. All of them carried the strange, effective pistols that could stun a man without killing him. Gary Horne's eyes swept back as other shapes drew closer. Within a few seconds a throng of twenty angry Thorians ringed him.

Jaro stepped forward and tore the metal ring from his pocket. His eyes gleamed as he gripped it in his skinny hand.

"You valued it highly, man of the Seventh Plane," he smirked. "A life is a high price to pay for such a miserly bit of metal!" His small eyes gleamed as though he were already watching the physicist's death struggles.

"It would be far less than I would pay to see this band twisted about your scrawny neck!" Horne rasped.

Jaro laughed harshly. He turned from the heart-sick captive and glanced at the lighted windows of the auditorium. With a smirk at the others, he said,

"Let us give Her Majesty the privilege of deciding what his death shall be. She waits for him inside. It would not be customary to execute him without first consulting our ruler!"

The Workmaster gestured for the others to bring Horne along, and turned on his heel to stride into the building.

BLACK despair caused a sob to well from the young scientist's throat as they hauled him along. What a horrible botch he had made of things! His bitter thoughts came to an abrupt end as Queen Thala suddenly appeared before

them. Her lovely face turned pale and distraught as she saw what had happened. She stood in the doorway to the auditorium with one hand held to her breast.

Jaro strode forward arrogantly. With a curt nod he gloated,

"A captive, Your Majesty! We have brought him to you for sentence. No doubt he would like to hear the fatal word from your own lips!"

Thala could barely suppress an anguished gasp. Gary Horne's heart struck a sharp beat as he saw the thin metal hand about the girl's forehead. If the Thorians knew it was the one they sought!

His eyes wandered past Thala to the little heap of apparatus that lay on the floor at the foot of the pyramid on which the machine rested. The girl had kept to her part of the plan. If only he could have performed his!

"Step forward, Earthman!" Jaro commanded harshly. "Kneel at the feet of our Queen and receive sentence." Cunning hatred twisted his thin lips. His little black eyes sparkled venomously.

Gary Horne was thrust forward by his guards over the threshold while the Masters strode past him into the rooms. Thala hit her lip as he went down on his knees before her where she stood by the door. Only her great strength of will kept the tears back from her soft, compassionate eyes. Slowly she extended her right hand and placed it on his shoulder.

The young scientist started, as the pressure of her fingers dug into his shoulder. His eyes swept up to seek hers. Was she trying to tell him something? For her hand seemed to be pulling him toward her, urging him to something which he could not understand.

Her blue eyes burned into his. They

were trying to impart a message, a message she dared not think for fear the Council would intercept it. For a brief moment the four rulers were behind her in the room. In that moment Gary Horne understood.

Hope lent strength to his legs as he sprang past her across the door-sill. Thala followed him an instant later. A roar of rage welled up from the captors behind as they charged after him. Then there was a clang as Thala slammed the door shut and swung the heavy metal locking device into place. Fists and pistol butts thudded on the panels, and strange cries came to their ears as angry men forgot their thought-impulses in their excitement.

The door was bulging inward as the girl whirled and rushed over to the young scientist. For just a moment he took her in his arms and held her close then he tore himself away and cried,

"The tubes—are they ready?"

Thala ran and picked up the parts he had hoped were the needed replacements.

"Ready!" she told him. "They need only to be placed in the machine."

Horne seized her hand and dashed up the steps toward the top of the pyramid. He squatted beside the apparatus and tore out the old vacuum tubes, shoved the new ones into the sockets. His fingers trembled in their eagerness. Below them the door resounded to heavy smashes as some object was swung against it. Thala's breathing was audible to him just in back as she waited tensely.

Now he stood up excitedly. "The switches?"

Without a word the girl hastened to a circular switchboard and turned several dials. A crackling of power filled the room as motors over the ceiling broke into life. The vacuum tubes glowed hotly. The atomic machine was

now in operation!

"How—how does it work?" Horne breathed.

Thala pointed over their heads to where a large, silver reflector looked toward them.

"The power is reflected onto the third step," she explained. "When you pass onto it, the force will strike you."

A splintering noise announced that the door was on the point of giving. Gary Horne turned to the girl.

"At this moment," he said tensely, "I'd rather do anything in the world but step on that spot. Because when I do that—I'll know I've stepped across the void that will separate us forever."

"But—you must!" Thala breathed, handing him the little platinum circlet she had taken from her head. "Your world must live on, though our own hearts die." But her soft lips trembled and belied her brave words.

Horne gripped her hands tightly as he turned away. Abruptly, he swung around.

"Thala!" he burst out eagerly. "Why can't you do it, too? Come with me, step on the spot as I do, and then nothing can ever part us again. We'll be together in my world for the rest of our lives!"

The girl started as the idea took hold. "But—Gary," she protested, "this is my world. I belong here."

"Why?" he argued. "We belong together, no matter whose world we must live in. Come with me, Thala!"

The girl's face was a screen of mixed emotions. She struggled with the desire to remain in her own world and the eagerness to be with him on Earth. It was a choice no woman had ever been faced with before in all the ages.

There was a loud crash at the door, and then a roar of sound as the voices of the enraged Thorians carried through the smashed wood. The two lovers

whirled to see what had happened. Horne's eyes widened with fear. Jaro had broken the door down and now was springing through! At his heels came others, shouting, gesticulating, eager for the blood of the Earthman.

"Quickly!" Gary Horne cried, turning back to his beloved. "Will you go with me?"

She hesitated for a moment; then her lips parted to breathe, "I'll go!"

WITHOUT another second's pause Gary Horne picked her up in his arms and stepped down onto the third step. In his right hand he clutched the platinum ring. A column of green fire seemed to envelop them as the full force of the reversing ray burned down on their bodies. In that one moment all sound, all sight, everything ceased. The auditorium walls flowed back from them, seeming to retreat from the on-rushing curtain of green fire that swept them back. The crackling of electricity faded out. A faint, far-off roar filled Gary Horne's ears, like the sound when a sea shell is held to the ear.

Again he was rushing up into the far reaches of space at breath-taking speed. Again there came the dizzying sensation of turning over in the air. His arms and legs lost all sensation. He was as nerveless as a stick of wood, as blind as stone.

After a long while the green light faded. The soft roaring sound tapered off. A tension seemed building up, as though he was in a balloon that was being inflated and must soon break. Gary Horne's ears began to hurt. Suddenly there was a loud bang. The tension ceased. Bit by bit feeling returned to his numb limbs. . . .

He opened his eyes to find he was lying on the floor. With a jerk he sat up and started down into his arms, still crooked from the girl's weight.

"Thala!" Horne gasped. She was not there.

There was nothing there! His arms were empty and the platinum circlet had vanished. He opened his hand where he had clutched the ring, and he fancied he saw a tiny, shining bit of dust float to the floor.

"Thala!" he breathed in anguish. "Oh God, Thala!"

He did not know how long his tortured thoughts reached out to that other world. He only knew, after a bit, that something was scraping on the floor by his side, and a stout, bespectacled man was saying:

"Horne! For heaven's sake, man, snap out of it! My, you had us nearly scared to death!"

It was Dr. Lansinger, one of his research associates at the University.

Lanky Dr. Andrews mopped his intellectual brow with a handkerchief. Andrews was a mathematician, and ordinarily he prided himself on his calm detachment.

"For five seconds," Andrews said hoarsely, "every man in this room could have sworn you had vanished. It—it's utterly incredible!"

Dr. Gary Horne, home again, got slowly, shakily to his feet and let his eyes travel about the familiar lecture hall.

"Yes," he said somberly, "it must have seemed—incredible, to you. Something about the violet-green light, I suppose. Must have knocked me down. I thought—for a while—that I had been—carried out of here myself. Funny—what a jolt of escaping electricity can do to you. . . ."

Five seconds, they had said. But not in the time-reckoning of the Fifth Plane! Not in the eyes of Gary Horne! And certainly not in the life of Thala, Queen of another world!

Five seconds—but to Gary Horne it had been a lifetime. A lifetime, because though he was still young, and handsome, and famous besides, the girl of his dreams had vanished.

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MEANWHILE

IN ANOTHER PART OF GERMANY, HERMAN, CHEMICAL HAMMER, INDIGNANT AT PRUSSIAN AUTHORITIES FOR HOLDING UP HIS ZINC OXIDE ON SUSPICION IT CONTAINED ARSENIC, CLEARED HIMSELF BY PROVING THAT THE YELLOW SUBSTANCE WAS NOT ARSENIC BUT IN REALITY A NEW ELEMENT—



BOTH MEN DISCOVERED CADMIUM IN 1817—BOTH WERE CONCERNED WITH DRUGS—BOTH CREATED IN GERMANY—BOTH WORKED OUT THEIR DISCOVERIES INDEPENDENTLY AND SIMULTANEOUSLY



SO SMALL IS THE PERCENTAGE OF CADMIUM IN ORE THAT IT CAN BE PROPPED, COMBED—ONLY, ONLY IS A TIN-PRODUCT. IN ROASTING ZINC, COPPER OR LEAD, FLUE DUSTS AND VAT RESIDUES ARE COLLECTED, DISTILLED, AND THE CADMIUM DAZZLED OFF.



CADMIUM AS A GAFF-STANDER

TOOLS TAKEN BY ADMIRAL BYRD ON HIS SOUTH POLE EXPEDITION WERE PLATED WITH CADMIUM; SABERS AND AXES ARE THE TOOLS IN YOUR AUTOMOBILE KIT. PLATES AND CADMIUM TAKE PLENTY OF PUNISHMENT, ADDS TO APPEARANCE, IS ECONOMICAL . . .



CADMUM-SILVER-COPPER

BEARINGS IN DIESEL-REACT AND TRUCKS HAVE MUCH LONGER FATIGUE LIFE THAN COMMON BEARINGS. NOW, THESE BEARINGS, TREATED WITH CADMIUM, ARE PROOF AGAINST CORROSION BY ORGANIC ACIDS IN OIL.

CADMUM is number 48 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Cd and its atomic weight is 112.41. It is a metallic element, associated with zinc. It is separated by distillation, cadmium having a lower boiling point. It is an important component of fusible alloys (Wood's metal, etc.). During the war, Germany, cut off from the world's supply of tin, used cadmium in preparing solder. The salts of cadmium are used in arts, in medicine, and in electroplating. Certain more rare salts are used in dentistry, photography and dyeing. Cadmium sulfide, CdS is produced as a yellow precipitate by treating a solution of cadmium salt with hydrogen sulfide. This is known as "cadmium yellow" and is used as a pigment (street cars, passenger coaches, etc.). When correctly prepared, it is the most permanent pigment that has yet been found.



A tank smashed through the wall below, its guns spitting flame

SABOTAGE ON MARS.

by MAURICE DUCLOS

THE big desert bus slid to a halt. I spat the sand out of my mouth and eased myself off the rods. Then I crawled out between the caterpillar treads, being careful to choose the side of the bus opposite to where the passengers were getting off.

Every bone in my body was crying out in agony after the long uncomfortable ride clinging to those damnable rods.

"Damn!" I muttered.

I had reason to say more than that, for my legs were numb, and my arms were burned red with sand where I'd been forced to hang on for dear life as the bus lurched over the dunes, or lunged like a mad hippo into an especially soft dune. My hair was full of grit and so was my mouth.

"Sand!" I exclaimed in disgust.

I spat once or twice then gave it up. I'd have to chew sand until I got a drink. But I was in town at last.

I knew the town was just another of those infernal jerkwater army burgs that dot the desert wastes of Mars. So I didn't bother to glance around; I just

RFDW
Walters' machine was intended to transport people from Earth to Mars. It worked on animals, why not on humans—or other things—war tanks, for instance?

patted the dust off my clothes and sprang up and down like a boxer waiting for the bell.

In fact, I was so busy I didn't hear the woman come up. First thing I knew, a tinkling honey voice was saying,

"Welcome to Crestview. I'm so glad you were able to make it!"

I jerked my head around. Standing next to me was an eyeful; the dark exotic type. Skin the color of old ivory, big flashing eyes with a hint of fire in their depths, streamlined figure. The sort of dame you might expect to see on Wilshire Boulevard or the Martian Way—in other words, as out of place

in this wind-swept dump as a luscious peach on a quince tree.

She was smiling too. But I'm no sucker. I shot a quick glance behind me; no one was there. So I turned back and said,

"Eh?"

Her voice was as smooth as honey. "Welcome to Crestview, Doctor."

"Doctor!"

I gulped and wondered if I was hearing right. *Doctor*—What kind of a person was this medico she had mistaken me for? Or maybe this was her idea of fun. . . .

I batted my hat viciously, making the dust fly.

"Sure you haven't got your wires crossed, lady?"

She laughed throatily. "Of course not! Don't you remember the General Hospital on Earth? I was a student nurse, you an interne. I gave it up after awhile. Don't you remember Marcia Koch?"

"I certainly don't," I said. "Who—"

"I understand. You were so busy and everything. You never had time for women, anyway."

"Oh, I don't know—" I began, but she kept right on talking.

"All that's changed now, isn't it, Doctor? We'll be seeing quite a lot of each other, now that you've accepted the job here."

A job! I began to take more interest in the conversation. I'd hunted over half of Mars for a good job, and even though I had youth and strength on my side, I'd only managed to pick up odds and ends. Right now a dime and a few pennies jingled forlornly in my pocket. I wanted a job badly—even to the extent of posing as a doctor!

I shot a glance over this streamlined heart-throb who called herself Marcia Koch. Interesting possibilities became apparent, even in the big dark eyes that

gazed into mine.

"Marcia," I said, "you fascinate me. What about this job?"

She showed even pearly teeth. "Don't worry, Doctor, your pay will be generous. In fact, very generous."

She slipped a slim arm through mine, drew me toward a long black limousine that stood on one side of the sandy patch that posed as a road.

She gazed up at me. "I—got your call about losing your suitcase. Annoying luck when you're on a trip. I've taken the liberty of sending for some new clothes for you."

A SHORT swarthy driver held the car door open for us. The caterpillar treads kicked up the sand, and we were whizzing down a dusty road past a few huddled store buildings. A house was visible here and there, some army barracks in the background, then we were in the open.

I eased luxuriously back into the cushions and stretched out my legs. Riding the rods one minute, the next gliding along in a limousine with a beautiful woman at my side! Well, it was a little confusing. I couldn't help wondering what would happen next—what this young lady was up to, what sort of performance I would be expected to give.

The car halted before a husky steel gate set in a high brick wall—the kind that would be swell for an insane asylum or prison. A dark foreign-looking man, who might have been a brother of our chauffeur, opened the gates, and in we rolled. I saw that the wall enclosed plenty of acreage. In the center were several trim buildings; a big modernistic mansion, a bungalow, and a square building with a white-domed roof like an observatory.

I thought it was about time for a little information from Marcia.

"Well, well!" I said. "Is that an observatory?"

"Um-m," she responded. "Yes and no."

Just then the car eased to a stop before the mansion and a butler popped out of nowhere to open the door for us.

Marcia smiled sleekly. "Well, here we are, Doctor!" She held me back with a hand. "James—the butler—will show you to your room. You can freshen up and change into a new suit, then we'll talk about your job. And, oh yes, Doctor—when you—ah—shave, you might skip the whiskers on your chin. It'll give you sort of a Vandycyke effect—more professional looking, you know!"

Well, if I do say so myself, I did look like a professional man after I'd got cleaned up and decked out in a new suit. Of course, my face was a little red and chapped from riding under the bus, and my eyes were bloodshot. But heck, anyone would put that down as being caused by too many gin fizzes.

So I went downstairs, and one of the innumerable servants directed me into the library where Marcia Koch waited. She had changed into a filmy yellow outfit that made her more dazzling than ever.

I gulped and said to myself, "Nice stuff!" Out loud I remarked, "Quite a dump you've got, Marcia. All by your lonesome here?"

Her eyes swung in rapid survey over me, centered coldly on my face as though trying to dig around in my thoughts. Finally she said,

"I don't live by myself—haven't you noticed the servants? And another thing—for a doctor, your language is atrocious!"

I could see suspicion in her eyes.

"Listen," I told her, "maybe I'm dumb, but I don't see any literary pearls dropping off your lips."

Her ivory cheeks got a little flushed, but I went right on.

"Anyway, I thought you wanted to explain about a job. What sort is it?"

"Doctoring!" she spat out and the word sizzled.

"Yeah. I gathered as much. Who's the patient?"

"There isn't any—yet!"

I opened my mouth to say something, then shut it. I couldn't get back on our former chummy basis by antagonizing her.

MARCIA KOCH leaned against a reading table, kept her eyes on me.

"I'm employing you," she said, "to watch the health of a Mr. Walters. He's a scientist who has allowed me to help him financially. He's getting along in years and something might conceivably happen to his health. That's why you're here. Your pay, by the way, will be five hundred a week."

My jaw failed to function right. "Five hundred!" I stammered. "Five hundred to play nursemaid?" Gosh, maybe I'd stumbled into a crazy house after all!

"Five hundred is correct." She nodded her sleek head. "But the job will probably not last much longer than a week."

It still didn't make sense. "What about this Walters guy?" I asked. "I suppose he putters around in that domed building that isn't an observatory, yet is one."

"Yes," she said crisply. "That's his laboratory. I had it built for him several years ago. Poor fellow had spent all his money trying to solve a problem. His results were encouraging but he couldn't continue without money. But everyone he approached laughed at him, called him a 'visionary'."

"I was the only person to see possi-

bilities in his work. And since I have wealth, I considered it my duty to bring him here and let him continue this great work; he has really achieved marvelous results, although he hasn't quite reached his goal yet. But I'm satisfied."

I met her eyes. "Yeah? Now let me ask a question. Just where do I fit in? Suppose I went to work this instant; what would I do?"

Marcia drew herself up. "You'd get acquainted with your prospective patient, of course. He lives with his daughter in that little hungalow outside, but he'll probably be in the laboratory right now. Let's go!"

I followed her out of the house, and we ambled past a couple of dark husky gardeners very busily doing stuff to bushes. We reached the white observatory-like building, stopped before a door. This door was set right in a larger door—a big thing about twice the height and width of an automobile garage door. I suppose it was opened only to bring in bulky pieces of apparatus.

Marcia pressed a hell button and we stood there waiting for the door to open. I guess she saw my raised eyebrows.

"Mr. Walters," she said, "keeps the door locked. He doesn't like to be disturbed."

The door cracked open a trifle and somebody behind it gave us the once-over. Then it opened entirely, and there stood a dazzling little slip of a blue-eyed blonde.

"Come in, Miss Koch," said the blonde, and her voice was as smooth as butter on hotcakes.

In we went. Well, it was a laboratory of some kind, all right, but it looked more like a powerhouse to me. There was a cleared space running from the big garage doors clear to the center of the room. Around this clearing hulked huge transformers, glass tubes

and cables and stuff. A wilderness of it.

"Where's your father, Lucy?" purred Marcia sweetly. "I want him to meet the doctor here."

"He's over this way," said the blonde, walking with us past the conglomerated junk. She was a luscious tidbit if ever there was one. Wow! I couldn't keep my eyes off her. And I saw with interest that she was watching me out of the corner of her own big blue eyes.

WE drew up on one side of the clearing where a man was working. He stood on a stepladder before a big panel of instruments, doing things with a soldering iron. He looked to be about sixty-five, thin, shriveled.

There were bags underneath his eyes, wrinkles on his dead-white face. Only thing that looked alive about him were his eyes. They were blue like his daughter's, with a peculiar frosty glint. Nothing old about those orbs; they were young, and they snapped with an inner fire.

Marcia turned on the old personality gag.

"Ob Mr. Walters," she cooed, "I want you to meet an old friend of mine. Doctor—ah—Doctor Pfaffinger."

Inwardly I groaned. Pfaffinger! What a moniker! No wonder she'd momentarily forgotten it. I smiled and stuck up my hand.

"Glad t'meet you, Walters," I boomed.

"Delighted, I'm sure," he replied, taking my hand. "A doctor, eh? Somebody around here sick?"

That blast froze my mouth. But it didn't bother Marcia a bit. She went right on talking chattily, and the old goat went right on splattering solder around with his iron.

"You see," said Marcia, "Doctor Pfaffinger and I were both students at

the same hospital on Earth. He happened to be visiting Mars, so for old times' sake I asked him to stay with us a few days. As a matter of fact, I've decided to let him give you a complete check-over tomorrow, Mr. Walters!"

The old fellow almost vibrated off his perch.

"What!" he spluttered. "Why, I've never felt better in my life!"

"That's just the point," purred Marcia. "You've been spending too much time on your work. You must be careful of your health—mustn't he, Doctor?"

She eased around in my direction. My head see-sawed up and down mechanically.

The blonde's big blue eyes were fixed on me anxiously.

"I'm sure father's health is perfect. . . . Thanks just the same for your interest, Doctor Pfaf—uh—Doctor."

Under the dazzling gaze of those orbs I felt a warm glow of returning life.

I made chucking noises of reproach. "Why, Lucy! I shouldn't think you'd want to take a chance with your father's health. Just because a person feels well means nothing at all. I'll give him the once-over. In fact—"

I reached down, grabbed one of her hands and pressed a finger near her wrist, where there's supposed to be a pulse.

"In fact— Yes, I'd better give you a thorough check-over, too!"

I felt Marcia's arm suddenly in mine, and then I was being turned around toward the door. But this seemed a too-abrupt way of parting company with Walters and his daughter. So I sent a farewell shot over my shoulder toward the petrified statue of science on the stepladder.

"Ben Franklin sure knew his stuff," I called. "You get quite a *jolt* out of experimenting with electricity, eh,

Walters?"

I started to laugh at my own wit, but Walters jerked back to life and his excitement drowned me out.

"Electricity!" he exclaimed. "My dear fellow, I work with *atoms!* I take things apart, make atoms out of them, then I put them together again."

"Hm-m," I remarked. "Isn't that a waste of effort? If you take things apart and then put—"

I got no further. One of Marcia's stubby slippers contacted very smartly with my shin. Then I was whisked past the masses of apparatus and through the door into the open.

CHAPTER II

Busy Gardeners

MARCIA didn't say a thing. I didn't say a thing. She just hung onto me desperately, as if I might evaporate. I kind of liked that; I could feel the rhythmic sway of her hips against me as we walked toward the mansion.

Well, I began to get ideas about cutting myself a piece of cake. Hell, who wouldn't have? It's not every day you have an apparently unattached and apparently rich and obviously beautiful young thing clinging to your arm.

Then I remembered some fool proverb about, "He who hesitates is lost." So when we got on the porch I stopped her masterfully, whipped my arm about her waist and drew her close. There wasn't an ounce of resistance in her as I did a good job of osculation. That's what fooled me—that and a few other things. One of them was the quickness of her reflexes after I'd released her.

I didn't see her fist until it landed like a condensed version of the Fourth of July in my left eye.

"You clumsy clod!" she spat out, and glared at me from eyes that were as

hard and cold as black ice.

I got my mouth open to say something, and by that time some of the busky gardeners had plopped out of nowhere and surrounded me—not two of them but three, with a butler thrown in for good measure. One had a sickle in his hand, one a shovel, the other a rake. The butler was armed with nothing but a big brown fist that looked as hard as cast iron.

"Shall we give dis lug a woiking over, Miss?" he asked politely of Marcia.

She shook her head. "No. I can take care of him all right. Go back to your posts, all of you."

After they'd gone I dabbed at my eye with a handkerchief and breathed easier.

Standing stiff and straight, Marcia held the door open for me.

"Come in, you," she said acidly. "There's some talking to be done!"

We went into the library again and I dropped into a chair. She sat at a nearby desk.

"Now that you've forced the issue, Doctor," she began, "I think we'd better come to an understanding. You have only one job here—to watch the health of Mr. Walters."

"Yeah, I know," I remarked. "But he doesn't seem to be a very coöperative fellow."

Her eyes gleamed. "That can be taken care of."

"Huh! It'd take a sledgehammer to bring him around."

She shook her sleek head. "Not quite—just a little stuff in his coffee."

I BLINKED. "Eh? Come again?"

"I remarked," she said smoothly, "that after eating supper one of these evenings, Mr. Walters is going to develop a stomach ache."

"How do you know?"

Marcia sat on the edge of her chair,

leaned her elbows on the desk. Her dark eyes never left my face.

"Oh, he'll get a stomach ache, never fear. As I've explained, he and his daughter live in that little bungalow by the laboratory. They're rather tied down, though, and it's hard for them to get into town for food supplies.

"So I have my cook bring over their meals to them. Walters drinks coffee, his daughter doesn't. . . . So he's going to get such a painful stomach ache, he'll be glad to catch sight of your face. You'll feel very sorry for him, give him a hypo to ease the pain.

"It is quite possible that this hypo will be so powerful that he'll go to sleep—ah—permanently. . . ."

I sat and stared at Marcia for a long minute while bees buzzed in my skull. I began to feel a little sick in the stomach myself; maybe that fee of five hundred wasn't so much after all. She stared back unblinkingly at me with those dark glittering eyes of hers.

Finally I said, "You're after Walters' invention—but I don't see why. You seem to have more money than you know what to do with right now."

She nodded. "I've got all the money I want. What I intend to do with Walters' invention doesn't concern you."

"Sounds screwy to me," I said. "If you're backing Walters, you're part owner of the gadget. Why've you got to do away with him?"

Marcia's face remained inscrutable. "I'm going to use his apparatus in a manner he wouldn't approve of."

"For crying out loud, what the devil is this contraption, anyway?"

"You heard what he said."

"You mean that crazy spiel about making atoms of stuff and then putting them together again? Hell, that doesn't make sense!"

Marcia sat up straight. "It doesn't have to make sense to you!" she

snapped. "You're getting five hundred for a job—that's all that should concern you."

"That's just it!" I wailed. "I don't like it!"

Marcia's lips curled. "I had you spotted for a masher when I picked you up this afternoon, but I thought five hundred would hold you down—well, I'll give you six hundred, and not a cent more. Remember, hums pass through Crestview every day."

"That's what I mean," I said. "Why pick on me? You've got plenty of gorillas around here. Why don't you have one of them do your dirty work?"

"Stupid! How can they pose as a doctor when everybody in town knows them, not to mention Walters himself? And Walters must be killed so skilfully that even his daughter won't become suspicious of us."

Again I stared at this streamlined, dark-eyed bundle of femininity opposite me. She was beautiful, all right. But hell, a snake has dark eyes and is streamlined, and is beautiful—after a fashion.

"Suppose," I mumbled, "that the hypo Walters gets jabbed with isn't—ah—enough to put him to sleep permanently?"

"Oh, but it will be," she answered smoothly. "You'll see to that."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

I took a deep breath and thumped my chest with both hands.

"Ah! I bear the call of the open road. I think I'll travel."

MARCIA smiled thinly. "I don't think so. Not unless you want to leave some dark night—feet first. You know too much now. I have two ways of silencing you, though. One is to make you go through with your job; you won't dare talk then."

"The other way is for my boys to take care of you—and it won't be by an overdose of dope, either. No one in this town knows you're here; no one would miss you."

"Marcia," I said, "you sure talk a convincing argument. Fact of the matter is, I'm beginning to see your point. Anyway, I can use that six hundred bucks!"

Well, that's the way matters stood for the rest of the day. Marcia and I had a very cozy little supper together—to which I did full justice, because I intended it to be the first and last I'd have in this place. Then, about eleven o'clock, Marcia retired. I took the hint and went to my room, shutting the door loudly behind me.

I moved around for a few minutes, opening and closing drawers and making a lot of noise in general. Finally I shut off the light and plopped heavily on the bed, as though I'd retired.

I waited an hour or so after the household had quieted down. Then I tiptoed to the window and peered out. Starlight touched objects in the yard with a faint silvery glow, high-lighted old Walters' domed laboratory and the little hungalow where he and his daughter lived.

The intervening lawn was a pale silver sheet, and bushes and shrubs were patches of light and darkness. I watched for ten minutes; not a light showed, not a thing moved.

So I unhooked the window screen, straddled the sill and eased myself over. My room was on the second floor; and in order to lessen the distance of the drop, I hung onto the window ledge, let my feet dangle. I let go.

There were bushes below, but I landed between them in some freshly worked earth, making hardly a sound. Of course, as I straightened up, I was still facing the building. There was a

big crystalloid window in the wall, and in the window, almost eye to eye with me, was a face looking out; a woman's face, exotically beautiful there in the darkness. Marcia Koch.

"Nice night for a walk, isn't it?" came her voice as if from a distance.

Nose to nose, we measured each other. But she was on the inside and I was out.

So I said, "You're damned right—and I'm walking!"

I swung around on my heel, started to take a step. It was then I made a dynamic discovery—the husky gardeners were still on the job. At least, I supposed them to be gardeners, because one rose from the bushes on either side of me with water hoses in their hands. Each of the men grabbed an arm.

"Goin' some place, Bud?" one asked.

I nodded my head. But when my throat finally decided to work, a weak "no" came out.

"Now that's damned clever figuring on your part," avowed the other gorilla. "'Cause if you had been goin' some place, we might have gotten rough—somethin' like this—"

HE lifted up his arm that held the water hose, and then I made a second dynamic discovery. The hose was only about two feet long. It landed with a thud across my kidneys. I got half a yell out when the other man hit me in the stomach. I doubled up, gasping for air.

Then the boys started to go to town with their rubber hoses. I would have pitched forward on my face if they hadn't held me up by the arms.

Somewhere through the roaring in my ears I heard Marcia's voice saying,

"Don't use your fists—we don't want any marks."

I began to get mad. I took a deep

breath, jerked my right arm free with a single motion and landed a haymaker on the gorilla's chin at my left. He folded like an accordion. I faced the other guy just in time to catch a glimpse of something coming up under my own chin. The world seemed to explode inside my head.

CHAPTER III

Undercurrents

WHEN I woke up, I found myself tucked very snugly in bed. It was daylight. I sat up and groaned. My jaw ached, my back ached, every bone in my body ached. But there wasn't a scratch on me, save for the shiner Marcia had thoughtlessly hung on my eye the day before.

I dressed and went downstairs, where I found Marcia hard at her breakfast. I sat down stiffly opposite her.

She cocked her dark head on one side and observed brightly,

"There's nothing like a good night's rest to improve one's appetite—is there, Doctor?"

I nodded. "You're right. Guess I've overdone it, though. I haven't got an appetite."

"I'm sorry. Maybe it will help matters if I tell you I've decided to make tonight the night."

"Yeah?" I growled. "Speak up. I'm in no mood to guess at riddles."

Slowly Marcia put down the spoon with which she had been attacking half a Martian muskfruit. Her dark eyes glittered.

"Very well. Your impatient attitude has made me decide to rush matters. Tonight Walters is going to develop a stomach ache. He always putters around in his laboratory after supper, so you'll probably be called there. To make the visit seem casual, you'll go

alone."

"Yeah, I know," I cut in. "Then I'll put him out for good with a jumbo hypo."

"Of course. Then you'll pull up one of the window blinds as a signal that Walters is dead. I'll come in, scream at sight of him, and my men will follow. . . . Oh, there'll be quite an hysterical gathering for a few minutes—for the benefit of Walters' daughter."

"My, you're quite an organizer, Marcia."

She purred, "But that's not all. The townfolks will have to have some logical explanation to digest, so you'll announce that Walters' death was the result of a heart attack. And since you are a famous Earth doctor—well, Walters died of a heart attack, that's all. The natives won't think of an autopsy."

"Swell," I nodded. "After that, it'll be easy enough to get rid of the girl, eh? Give her a little money and send her on her way?"

"Prosaically, yes." Marcia waved a negligent spoon. "Simple, isn't it?"

"It stinks."

Marcia's olive complexion took on a little color. She put both elbows on the table, leaned toward me.

"Listen, Doctor," she said acidly, "don't make the mistake of thinking I'm simple too. I've got to have that invention and I'm going to get it, one way or another. This plan is merely the smoothest method."

"So if you're thinking of trying to outwit me by some trick like that sleep-walking stunt of yours, forget it."

I rose to my feet. "Okay, Marcia," I said. "I'll be a good boy. I like little me too well to get humped off for an old goat like Walters. Don't worry your pretty head."

She looked at me calmly. "I'm not worrying—I don't have to."

She didn't say anything further as

I sauntered toward the front door—anything else would have been an anticlimax!

OUTSIDE the sun was shining and the Martian hooting birds were hooting and the gardeners were busily rummaging around in the bushes. I ambled around a little while, and one or two of the gardeners were always doing stuff close behind me.

I contemplated nature, did a few turnabouts around old Walters' hovel. Finally the luscious little blonde came out. She made a heeline for me.

"Gosh, I'm glad I saw you, Dr. Pfaf—uh—Doctor," she said, falling into step with me.

"Yes?" I encouraged.

She shot a glance over her shoulder at the gardeners, then looked up at me with anxious blue eyes.

"I wanted to talk—" She broke off. "Why, Doctor! Your eye is black! What happened?"

That caught me off guard. "Uh—I tried to get warm over a stove but it was cold—plenty cold."

Lucy frowned. "I don't think I quite know what you mean," she said.

"Skip it. It doesn't matter anyway. Now, what'd you want to talk to me about?"

She eyed my eye and was a picture of indecision.

"Oh, I don't know what to do! I've got to have someone I can trust, someone who'll advise me. I made up my mind yesterday to ask you because doctors are generally honest. But now I don't know. . . . There seems to be something strange going on around here—"

I slipped my arm through hers.

"Lucy," I said huskily, "a doctor holds the confidences of others as a sacred trust. Their secrets are his secrets, no matter about what or

whom—”

I slid my arm from hers, slipped it comfortably around her waist.

“I want to help you, Lucy.”

Her big blue eyes studied me perplexedly.

“Go right ahead,” I urged. “What’s bothering you?”

She looked at the ground and fidgeted a little.

“It sounds silly, I suppose,” she whispered, “because I can’t quite tell what *is* the trouble. I just sense an undercurrent of danger in the atmosphere around here.

“Everything has gone nicely since we’ve been here, and Miss Koch has been wonderful to us—but I just can’t force myself to like her, that’s all. For the last few weeks I’ve felt a growing tension. Call it intuition, anything, but I just know something terrible’s going to happen.

“It’s almost like”—she sent her big blue eyes gazing up into mine—“like our very lives were in danger. Like, maybe, somebody was going to *kill* Dad! But that’s all foolishness—isn’t it, Doctor? There *couldn’t* be any excuse—”

My arm became so weak, it dropped from around her waist.

“Just a case of nerves,” I said. “You’re upset; been working too hard.”

“Oh, but I haven’t! I don’t do anything!”

“Okay, then. You’ve got too much time. Nothing to occupy your mind.”

Doubt puckered her brow, but she nodded her head anyway.

“I suppose so,” she admitted. “But I know it’s not all imagination. The gardeners, for instance. Haven’t you noticed how they follow you around almost like guards?”

I tried to chuckle reassuringly, but all I managed was a hoarse crackle. Then I got a brilliant idea.

I CLEARED my throat like a high-priced professional man.

“Lucy,” I said, “in cases like these I find that all that is needed is an antidote; something to neutralize the fear and the uneasiness in the mind. Uh—your father has a pistol, of course?”

She searched my face wonderingly. “Why, yes. He’s got one in the house somewhere.”

“Fine. The very next time you go into the house, I want you to get that pistol and put it in your pocket. Put a handful of shells in your pocket too. That’s my prescription, Lucy. You’ll be surprised at the confidence and the ease of mind that pistol will bring.”

Lucy’s lips smiled beautifully. “I guess I needed somebody like you to talk to. I feel better already. You don’t know what this means to me!”

I waved a negligent hand. “Forget it. I feel better about the whole thing myself.” I slid my arm around her waist again.

I saw, now, that we had walked to the door of Walters’ laboratory.

“What about your Dad, Lucy? Is he suspicious of things too?”

“Oh, no! He’s been too busy to think of anything but his invention.”

“Better not tell him, then,” I remarked sagely. “Uh—can he take things apart and stick ‘em together again pretty well now?”

“W-e-l-l,” said Lucy. “He can do it all right, but not like he planned. He’s going to try it again in a few minutes. Want to see how it works?”

CHAPTER IV

Atom Transport

LUCY opened the door, and into the laboratory we went. The big transformers were humming nastily, filling the air with tension. I followed gin-

gerly behind Lucy and we went across the clearing to the big switchboard.

Old Walters stood there muttering under his breath. His frosty eyes focused instantly on me and he looked unhappy about something.

"Ah—it's you, Dr. Pfaffinger," he said. He shook his finger testily. "If you think you've come here to make an invalid out of me, you're mistaken!"

I snorted suavely. "You're thinking of that physical check-up I was supposed to give you. Well, it's off—definitely. I just dropped around to watch you tinker with atoms."

That unruffled his feathers a bit. "Good." He cocked an eye at me. "Are you by any chance interested in physics?"

"Not a hit," I assured him.

He rubbed his hands together and beamed.

"Fine! Then I'm sure we'll get along quite nicely."

"Certainly," I vowed. "But"—I jerked my thumb at the growling transformers—"it seems to me you got a lot of juice tied up in those things. If you'd happen to get your wires crossed—"

"My dear young man!" he exclaimed. "I have only nine hundred thousand volts available. I need millions of horsepower—millions and millions!"

He turned on his heel and started toward a spiral steel stairway leading upward. I followed him.

He stopped a moment, shot a sizzling glance backward.

"Lucy," he rasped, "you stay right where you are. I can take care of things all right by myself."

Lucy was sitting at a writing desk near the switchboard.

"Yes, father," she said meekly.

He started up the narrow steps. We were halfway up when he stopped and turned around to face me.

"Young man," he whispered hoarsely,

"it's dangerous up here, and it's narrow and crowded."

I waved my hand. "Don't apologize, sir. I'm used to roughing it."

His cheeks puffed up so large that for a minute it looked like he was going to try to blow me back down the stairs. But instead, he turned and bounded upward.

We came out on a sort of mezzanine floor located up near the level of the laboratory roof; a kind of shelf about sixteen feet square. Above this yawned the inside of the dome. A lot of giant tubes and other electrical apparatus were crowding the place. In the center, fixed on an equatorial mounting, were a couple of big complicated tubes pointing up toward a slot in the dome.

"Looks like a telescope," I observed.

Walters shot me a stiletto out of each eye.

"Confound it, young man," he exclaimed, "it is a telescope!"

"What've you got two tubes for then, sir?"

"One is a telescope, the other is my atomic transporter."

HE turned his back on me and began fumbling with the telescope controls, jockeying the thing around and aiming it up into the sky through the slit in the dome. I leaned over his shoulder and squinted along the tube. There was a wonderful expanse of blank blue sky up there.

"I don't see anything," I complained.

"But it's not night!" he protested. "You see, I'm aiming my atom transporter at Earth. I'm going to try to pick up something on Earth, break it into its primordial atoms, whisk them up here to Mars and then assemble them to their former shape in the converter down on the laboratory floor . . . Now please let me do my work, Dr. Pfaffinger," he added testily.

He yanked down viciously on a lever, and I thought for a second that lightning had hit the dome. There was a crash of sound and a glaring of light and a sudden protesting snarl from the transformers down on the lab floor. But I quickly saw that it was only Walters' gadget doing its stuff.

A pale beam was coming from the cylinder above the telescope, shooting up through the opening and into the sky. Then Walters pushed back on the lever and everything subsided.

The old goat brushed eagerly past me, leaned over the platform railing and shouted down to Lucy.

"Did it work? Did I get something in the converter?"

Lucy was still sitting on the desk. She didn't get off, she just glanced over at something I supposed was the "converter" and shook her blond head.

"No," she said. "Not a thing."

I clucked my tongue on the roof of my mouth.

Walters spun around to face me. "You think my invention won't work, Dr. Pfaffinger? Well, it will! If I had more power, I could pick up objects on Earth and transport them up here quicker than you could ever imagine!"

"Take it easy, Dad," I soothed. "I didn't say anything."

"I see that I must demonstrate further!" he said.

He wheeled back to the telescope, swung it downward toward the distant Martian landscape. He squinted through the eyepiece and moved the controls slowly. In a few minutes he said,

"Ah, here's a good subject! Now—"

I crowded up and put my eye to the lens. There was a view of the rusty desert sand, a few stunted bushes, and then the thing Walters had probably referred to—a kangarabbit, one of those small Martian animals that look like a cross between a kangaroo and a rabbit.

It was munching contentedly on one of the plants.

Walters' eyes were triumphant. "Now," he said, "I will demonstrate! That kangarabbit is about ten miles away, but I'll have it here in a jiffy. Please go downstairs and watch the converter."

Well, I thought maybe it wasn't such a bad idea at that; Lucy looked lonesome down there all by herself. I clattered down the steps, and just as I got to the bottom Walters cut loose with his gadget. The transformers howled as only transformers can, and the converter burst forth with a blinding light.

The converter, I could see now, was a large metal disk set in the floor, with a similar one suspended about ten feet above it—something like huge flat electrodes. Between these two the flames played for an instant.

And then I blinked. There, resting suddenly on the bottom plate, was a goodly portion of red Martian sand, a bush—and a kangarabbit eating the bush. Abruptly the animal became aware of its surroundings and gave a mighty leap that carried it out of sight behind a transformer.

OLD Walters' palely excited face beamed at me from the platform.

"Well, sir!" he exclaimed.

"I think you've got something there, Dad!" I yelled back. "You're going to give the spacelines between Earth and Mars a little competition, eh?"

He waved a hand. "Competition, young man! There just won't be any spacelines when this equipment is fully developed!"

I went over and sat with Lucy on the desktop. Stuff was buzzing around in my head. Old Walters really had something there, all right. If more power would turn the trick, would whisk things from Earth as easily as that kangarab-

hit had been snatched—wow!

The old duffer could build a similar apparatus on Earth to grab things from Mars, and then with a transportation system like that he'd soon be the richest person that ever lived. Marcia Koch would get a big cut on the profits, of course. But the catch was that Marcia didn't want the money. She just wanted the invention itself, for some secret use. And I was being forced into killing Walters so she could get it—Well, it didn't make sense.

Absently I began to put my arm around Lucy. But she hopped off the desk and there was just the slightest hint of reproach in her blue eyes.

"See what you've done now," she said.

I looked around in bewilderment. "Gosh, what? Did I make a mistake of etiquette?"

Lucy pointed at the pile of sand on the converter.

"That's what you've done," she said. "You've made Dad materialize a lot of sand in here—and every time he does that, he makes me shovel it out!"

"Okay, okay. I'll help you."

I started to get off the desk, but just then my eyes lit upon the newspaper Lucy had been sitting on. It was the *Crestview Daily Bugle*, and the black headlines rose up and smacked me right in the face:

U. S. ARMY POST HERE TO BEGIN TESTING NEW MECHANIZED EQUIPMENT

Nothing startling in that headline, of course. But it struck a responsive cord in my skull. I stared and stared, my eyes fascinated by the word "Army." Things were clicking into place now. It was pretty clear. Marcia Koch's actions made sense—damned potent sense! Key to it all was "Army."

Marcia could be only one thing—an operative of the United Fascist States of Europe. And if that was so, the possibilities were terrific!

This ruthless dictatorship had long cast greedy eyes at Mars, but had never dared tangle with the great American space fleet guarding the red planet. Well, with a gadget like Walters', they could secretly land a tremendous army, in almost no time, overrun the American outposts on Mars with no trouble at all, and that would be that.

The American space fleet, with its operating base snatched from under it, would be about as effective as a pop-gun against a steel wall. The plan was simple, it was practical, and had every chance of success!

I felt sick in the stomach. In fact, I felt sick all over.

I helped Lucy shovel out the sand, and I must have looked pretty green about the gills as I was doing it. Finally she said,

"Don't you feel well, Doctor?"

I TRIED a nonchalant laugh. "It's nothing; just my head giving me a little trouble."

Hell, what else could I say? I couldn't blurt out:

"Lucy, you'd better not let your Dad drink his coffee tonight—because if he does, he's going to get a stomach ache, and then I'll be forced to come over and kill him."

No, I couldn't say that. Walters was going to be killed by someone—and if that someone wasn't me, I'd be killed too! Either way, Marcia was going to win, and Mars would suddenly find itself in the grip of the terrible United Fascist States of Europe.

Yes, my head was giving me a little trouble. It was grinding like a buzz-saw minus a couple of teeth!

I took Lucy's hand, patted it.

"I've got to go now," I said.

Her big blue eyes looked a little wistful.

"Gosh," she whispered, "it gets awfully lonesome here with only Dad to talk to—"

"Oh, I'll be back—you can count on that! And Lucy—don't forget what I said about that pistol. Nothing like one to jack up the old morale."

She flashed me a smile. "I'll remember, Doctor!"

CHAPTER V

A Plan Astray

MARCIA KOCH was waiting for me when I entered the parlor of the mansion. She sent her dark eyes coldly over my frame.

"I understand you've been visiting Walters. I suppose he performed for you?"

I nodded. "And how! That transportation act of his will really bring down the house. In fact, it'll bring down most anything—including troops, for instance."

Marcia stiffened. "Just what do you mean?" she snapped. Her voice was dangerously hard.

"I mean, I've tumbled to your little game, Marcia. You and your gardeners and butlers are operatives of the United Fascist States of Europe. After you get rid of Walters, you're going to get more electricity and use his invention to bring soldiers up here and capture Mars."

Marcia sank back into her chair. Her eyes played over me speculatively.

"Apparently," she purred, "you can put two and two together better than your appearance would indicate. Or"—her voice became hard again—"did Walters help you?"

"Huh!" I grunted. "What kind of

a dope do you take me for? Walters would have to know he was going to be killed, to make him think along those lines. You didn't think I'd tell him I'm going to polish him off tonight, did you?"

"I don't know," mused Marcia. "It's rather hard to tell what you'll do. Or should I say, what you won't do. So I think it's better for all concerned that you stay in your room until you are called this evening."

Well, I stayed in my room, all right—because the door was locked and because a couple of gardeners were fixing bushes all day under my window.

Finally, about an hour after the short Martian sunset, Marcia came in with a couple of butlers crowding close behind her.

"Lucy has just come for you, Doctor," she said calmly. "Her father isn't feeling well."

I didn't say anything.

"Here's your kit," Marcia went on, pushing a small black satchel into my hand. "And remember—after you've tended to him, raise one of the window shades. As soon as I see it's up, I'll come over and put on my act. Is that clear?"

"Sure, sure," I growled. "I get you." I started to push out of the door.

Marcia's voice stopped me short. "Just a minute, Doctor!" She stepped in front of me and her eyes were frigid. "I want to be sure you *do* understand. Someone is going to die tonight—if it isn't Walters, it will be you. Remember that!"

I remembered. I remembered so well I couldn't think of anything else as I walked with Lucy to the laboratory. She had her arm through mine this time, hanging onto me desperately.

"Gosh, I'm glad you're here," she breathed. "I know you'll be able to fix Dad."

Croaking noises came out of my throat. That was all.

We reached the laboratory then, and ambled past the junk edging the clearing. Walters was sitting doubled up at his desk by the switchboard. His face was beaded with sweat and the bags under his eyes had dropped until they were pouches.

"Glad—you came, Dr. Pfaffinger," he gasped. "I have a very painful stomach ache."

I PUT down my satchel on the desk and looked at Lucy and Walters. They both looked at me. Sweat began to pop out on my forehead.

Walters looked up at me with agony making his face gray. At that, it was a toss-up which of us was the sicker.

I clasped my trembling hands behind my back and took a professional stance. I opened my mouth to say something, but not a sound came out, not even a croak. Desperately I lunged for my satchel, yanked it open.

Maybe there'd be something in it—pills, perhaps—with which I could stall Walters off for awhile until I'd collected my wits. But there wasn't. The valise held only two objects—significantly enough, a big evil-looking hypodermic needle and a stethoscope.

Walters' eyes fastened on the needle.

"What—what is that?" he groaned.

I waved my hand weakly. "Nothing," I squeaked. "Just a—a bypo."

"Well, administer it, please. I've never had such pain in my life! It—it's killing me!"

Killing him! God! That ill-chosen phrase turned the sweat on my forebead to beads of ice. I got the hypodermic needle out of the bag, but my hand trembled so much I could hardly hold it.

"You look ill." Lucy squinted troubled blue eyes at me. "Is your bead

bothering you again? You look a little green—"

That gave me an idea.

I wailed, "It's thumping like the devil!"

I lifted my hand toward my bead, and as I did so I purposely dropped the hypodermic needle. Its glass cylinder shattered on the concrete floor, spilling the potent contents.

"Oh, God!" Walters moaned, holding his stomach. "Get another one. Get some morphine. I can't stand this much longer!"

Blood began to circulate once more through my veins. Well, that was one crisis postponed!

"No more medicine, sir," I told him. "But you'll be all right in a little while, I'm sure. Probably just something you—er—drank. If that's the case, the thing to do is—uh—remove the source of the trouble. And since I don't carry stomach pumps around with me—well, a couple of fingers jammed as far down one's throat as possible is very effective."

He gazed up at me with blurry eyes.

"All right, all right—anything!"

Lucy and I got on either side of him and pounded his back as he leaned over and gagged. Sweat rolled off his contorted face. Finally he straightened up.

"It's hot in here!" he gasped hoarsely. He ripped off his tie. "I'm suffocating!"

I didn't see what he intended to do until he'd almost reached the window. The shock of it nearly lifted me out of my shoes. I landed between him and the window.

"Oh, no, you don't!" I gulped. "You don't touch this!"

Surprise stopped him for a moment. Then something of his old gusto twisted his wrinkled face.

"Confound you, man! I'm burning up! I need air!"

"And get pneumonia? Oh, no!" I turned toward Lucy. "Can't you do something, Lucy? Your father—"

He was past me in a flash. The window shade snapped up, spun madly on its bearings. I jumped for the cord like a ball player after a high one. I missed.

BUT old Walters didn't. I was still up in the air when both his hands caught me in the stomach. By the time my feet touched the floor, I was going backward. I kept on going backward until the base of my skull contacted very smartly with the concrete floor. Then through the fireworks I saw the old goat bending over me, wagging a scrawny finger in my face.

"You think I'm blind, eh?" he demanded fiercely. "I'm onto your game, Pfaffinger. I doubt that you're a doctor; you don't look intelligent enough! More likely you're an impostor who has duped poor Miss Koch. Why, you're just an adventurer after my invention. Oh, I've been noticing you, Mr. Pfaffinger!"

I wasn't listening. I was too fascinated by the horrible sight of that raised curtain. I couldn't tear my eyes away. The damage was done now!

I sprang to my feet, pushing Walters out of the way. Lucy stood on the sidelines, a perplexed frown on her oval face. I grabbed her hand earnestly.

"Listen, Lucy," I panted. "We've got to get out of this dump, all three of us. There's going to be a female ghoul after my blood in just about two seconds! After I'm done away with, there's no telling what'll happen to you!"

Lucy's free hand fluttered to her mouth.

"You—you mean Miss Koch?"

"Right! No time to explain. But if you brought that pistol like I said—"

A sound cut off my words, sound of a door opening. My head swiveled

around. There, framed in the doorway, was Marcia Koch. The surprise on her face didn't last long. I could see her stiffen, and her eyes began to glow like freshly lit forges.

All she said was, "So."

But the word and the deadly calm of her voice told me plenty.

Then she turned and called into the darkness outside.

"Boys! Come quick!"

Feet thudded near. I jolted to life and got to the door just as a mob of the gardeners did.

"Get him!" Marcia snapped at them. The nearest reached for something in his pocket. It wouldn't be a rubber hose, I knew that! I let him have a haymaker that picked him up, tumbled him back onto the others.

Then I yanked the door shut so swiftly that it scooped up Marcia and hurled her bodily out. Luckily the key was in the lock and I twisted it home.

Instantly an avalanche seemed to bang up against the door, but it held. Marcia's voice was raised shrilly.

I turned to where Walters and Lucy stood. Walters' scrawny frame was shaking as if some engine inside had come loose. It wasn't from fear, oh, no! It was from anger. At me!

"Pfaffinger!" came his bitter protest. "You can't get away with this! If you unlock that door now and give yourself up, Miss Koch and I will see that the authorities aren't too hard on you. Kidnapping and attempted robbery is a very serious matter. . . ."

"You," I snapped, "shut up! You don't know what it's all about!"

I turned to Lucy. "The gun, Lucy—did you bring it with you?"

SHE gave a quick nod of her blond head and the next instant was thrusting a small pressure-pistol into my hand. Her blue eyes were large and

frightened, and she looked like she needed comforting. I felt so good at that moment that I was on the point of tending to the comforting. Lucy trusted me!

But just then I became aware that old Walters was no longer with us. I spun around in time to see him fumble with the lock on the door. A howl like a factory whistle ripped from my lips. I jumped for him.

He gave me a triumphant grimace and flung open the door.

CHAPTER VI

Unwilling Patient

THE light revealed the gorillas outside, frozen tensely on the threshold.

"Miss Koch!" yelled Walters. "It's all right now—"

The gardeners caught sight of me bearing down on them with a pistol in my hand. Flame belched from their guns. They were rattled. A couple slugs snarled past me, and then old Walters uttered a squawk, twisted half around and fell forward on his face.

I gave a single quick squeeze on the trigger of the pressure-pistol. Two of the gorillas tumbled backward into their pals. I slammed the door, locked it.

Lucy had run up. She threw herself onto her father.

"They've killed him! They've murdered him!" she shrieked hysterically. "Oh, I knew it would happen. I just knew it!"

"Take it easy, Lucy."

I put my hands under her arms and dragged her away. Then I turned the old goat over on his back, ripped open the smock. Blood oozed out of a ragged hole in his left shoulder. It wasn't near his heart and it didn't seem to have hit

a bone. The only reason I could see for his being out cold was the egg-sized bump on his skull, where it had smacked the floor.

"Nothing much wrong with him," I told Lucy "professionally." "He'll be okay in a little while."

She started to laugh and cry at the same time, so I pushed the gun into her hand and growled,

"They're not through with us yet. Watch the door and windows. If they start something, shoot. I'll tend to your Dad."

I carried Walters over by the switchboard, stretched him out on the floor and bundled my coat under his head. His eyes opened then and he blinked stupidly for a moment.

"Easy there," I husked. "Lie still, don't try to move. Relax your arm."

"They—they shot me!" he groaned incredulously.

I nodded. "Yeah. But don't move, just stay the way you are. I'll tend to you."

Well, that kept Walters from getting in my way. So I went behind him where he couldn't see me and sat on the desk. I had some thinking to do.

We were in a hell of a spot, all three of us. The mob outside had seen Walters fall with a bullet in him. And that fact changed matters considerably. It automatically put an end to Marcia's plan of passing his death off as a heart attack. Now the only way remaining open to her would be for her gardeners to kill him. Of course, if they did that, Lucy would have to be included too, to keep her from talking.

Then Marcia would face the problem of explaining the disappearance of so well known a person as Walters. She might do it by leaving all three of our bodies in the lab and setting fire to it, then say we were "trapped."

Again, she might simply pull stakes

and vanish to some other part of Mars, where she could use Walters' invention effectively. In any event, the present set-up would cause her a lot of trouble, but she could get away with it.

So all I had to do now was save my own life and Lucy's and the old duffer's as well. I had to do it quick, or that pack of wolves outside would be coming in.

SOMEONE knocked on the door for attention.

"You in there, Doctor!" came Marcia's voice. "If you come out right now, we'll forget all this happened and you can go on your way. What about it?"

I kept quiet.

Lucy, standing by one of the transformers, with the gun in her hand, looked like she wanted to say something. I put my finger to my mouth. Marcia was trying to trick us, of course; I wasn't so dumb I couldn't see that. Once I was out, she wouldn't have any trouble getting Walters and Lucy.

All was quiet for a moment outside the door. Then Marcia's voice called again. It didn't sound like tinkling bells, either; there was a vicious twang to it that bleached me white as a bone.

"You have five minutes," she called. "If you're not out by then, we're coming in after you!"

I began to get a little sick in the stomach again. God! Trapped like worms under a descending boot. There wasn't even a visiphone in the laboratory—and even if there had been, the five minutes would be up before help could reach us.

I squirmed around on the desk and sweated. Then my eyes lit upon the newspaper I'd seen earlier in the day:

U. S. ARMY POST HERE
TO BEGIN TESTING NEW
MECHANIZED EQUIPMENT

I stared and stared at it, and bees began to buzz in my skull. I snatched up the paper, shot my eyes over the accompanying news item. Then I howled. I threw the paper ceilingward and jumped up and down ecstatically. I lit beside old Walters.

"Listen, Dad," I panted. "How do you run your gadget? How do you start it up?"

He looked up and gave me a contemptuous stare.

"Pfaffinger," he husked, "how could a human being sink so low? You try to steal my invention, then hold me and my daughter prisoners. Now you have the infernal gall to ask how to operate my apparatus. Young man, you may go to hell!"

The steam oozed out of me and froze. I had a strong impulse to cry, but I gulped and throttled it down. God! The old goat was as one-tracked as a two-year-old! I had only minutes to get him switched over on a new line—switched, hell! I'd have to derail him!

I took a deep breath.

"Walters," I lied, "I'll have to take you into my confidence. While I actually am a doctor, I'm using that title only as a blind right now."

I lowered my voice. "I have been specially deputized by the F. B. I. to investigate the activities of Marcia Koch. She is suspected of espionage. But I've discovered something that'll knock your ears down.

"She's been planning to kill you and your daughter, and use your apparatus to bring Fascist troops from Europe and grab Mars."

Walters looked up at me while he digested that.

"I don't believe it," he said.

I shook my head resignedly. "It doesn't matter what you believe, Walters. I'm thinking of the fate of your daughter and the fate of Mars—their

safety depends on operating your apparatus and operating it quickly. As for you, well, I've done everything humanly possible to prolong matters."

HIS eyes widened. "What do you mean?"

"Well," I said, "it'll be fifteen or twenty minutes, at the most."

"You mean I'm going—beyond?"

I motioned at his gory shoulder.

"Bleeding internally. Your lung. The bullet plowed open the *postaxial sacculus* which leads directly to the heart. Every indication of *telangiectasis periorbitis* through the *epithelium vacuole*. The *posterior caudal* is also neatly prognostic."

I'd been on the scene of a nasty space ship crack-up once, and the doctors had hopefully speculated on the condition of their patients. I couldn't remember any more of their lingo than that, but it was enough to impress Walters.

He groaned and let his eyes flutter closed.

"You sure, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid so, Walters. Too bad that bullet didn't finish you off right away. Then you wouldn't have to lie there and watch them shoot Lucy down like a dog."

Walters struggled up on one elbow. His eyes flashed wildly.

"Lord!" he babbled. "Are you telling the truth?"

I put a hand on his head and pushed him down again.

"Certainly."

"You're a rascal, Pfaffinger. I—I don't believe you!"

I dabbed at the wound on his shoulder with a handkerchief.

"I don't care what you believe, Walters," I told him for the second time. I passed the cloth casually in front of his eyes, where he couldn't help but see the blood on it.

"But if you want to die peacefully, knowing your daughter is safe, you'll have to tell me how to run your gadget. I can save her then—"

A sudden heavy banging at the big garagelike doors cut off my words. The panels shook violently but held.

"They're trying to break in!" shrilled Lucy from her vantage point.

"Give 'em a shot!" I yelled back, and watched her trembling hand fire the pressure-pistol. The bullet struck up near the doortop, so the hammering didn't stop a bit.

Sweating, I turned to Walters.

"Damn it, man! Are you just going to watch them bust in and kill us?"

He sank back with a groan.

"All right, all right, Doctor. You win. I can't afford to take a chance with Lucy's life. But how my apparatus can help—"

"Just shoot me the dope," I yelled, "and you'll see!"

He banged directions at me and I stood before the big switchboard and carried them out. I pulled levers and twisted knobs and read meters to him. All around us in the laboratory the transformers and tubes came to life.

Walters looked up at me.

"My—my life's work is in your hands now. Go up in the dome, aim the telescope at what you want and pull that lever you saw me use this morning. . . . And by God, Pfaffinger, I—I'm praying for you!"

The big doors were splitting, beginning to give under the battering-ram blows of the gang outside. I took the steel stairs up to the dome at full tilt. When I reached the platform I leaned over the railing and motioned at Lucy.

"Get out of the way!" I yelled. "Get over by your Dad and stay there!"

THEN I sprang to the telescope and
(Concluded on page 111)

FANTASTIC

ABOUT THE YEAR 1772 THERE ARRIVED IN FRANCE A PURPORTED NOBLEMAN NAMED COUNT CAGLIOSTRO. HE PRODUCED PURE GOLD BEFORE LARGE AUDIENCES BY CHEMISTRY AND SMELTING. THE PRODUCT WAS EXAMINED BY GOLDSMITHS WHO PRONOUNCED IT GENUINE.



COUNT CAGLIOSTRO, ALLEGED SUPER-CHEMIST. HIS "ELIXIR OF LIFE" WAS SUPPOSED TO LENGTHEN LIFE BY 5557 YEARS AND HE CLAIMED TO HAVE LIVED FOR CENTURIES.



ALEXANDRE DUMAS
THE GREAT FRENCH WRITER,
WHO WROTE A NOVEL REGARDING
THE AFFAIR OF THE
DIAMOND NECKLACE,
A STORY OF A SWINDLE IN
WHICH COUNT CAGLIOSTRO
AND OTHERS DEFRAUDED
CARDINAL de ROHAN OF A
HALF-MILLION DOLLARS

his beautiful wife, LORENZA, WAS HIS CONSTANT COMPANION AND CHIEF ASSISTANT. HER GREAT BEAUTY AND INTELLECT WON FOR THEM A MULTITUDE OF FRIENDS AND HELPED TO SUSTAIN THE COUNT'S ILLUSIONS.

JOE SEARLE

HOWEVER Count Cagliostro perpetrated his hoaxes, he always managed to be safe from detection. Even in his making of synthetic gold, chemists who carefully analyzed his product, could not deny it was the real thing

Hoaxes

BY JULIUS SCHWARTZ

Count Cagliostro, the man who grew famous by hoaxing the public with the dream of the alchemists, artificial gold

COUNT ALESSANDRO DI CAGLIOSTRO—or was he only Giuseppe Balsamo?—claimed to cure any disease, lengthen human life for centuries, and change trashy minerals into gold. He could hardly have chosen a more difficult age for his career of scientific and semi-scientific hoaxes than the skeptical and rational Eighteenth Century. The intelligentsia of Europe were disciples of Newton, Voltaire, Herschel, Rousseau, and had had to be shown. Cagliostro showed them—or appeared to, which was just as good at the time.

About the year 1743, there was born in Italy a shrewd and unprincipled lad named Giuseppe Balsamo. He raised an education of sorts, and embarked on an early career of fraud and imposture. It was this fellow, said Cagliostro's later enemies, who in the 1770's took the resounding title of Count Cagliostro and began to win honor and fortune in the capitals of Europe.

This early history is sometimes challenged by modern scholars. It must be remembered that the connection between the rascal Balsamo and the later nobleman Cagliostro is drawn by those who wished to do harm. In any case, Count Cagliostro came to France in 1772, and made an instant success. His beautiful and intelligent wife Lorenza was a great aid to him, and was his chief assistant in his curiosum-raising feat—the apparent production, by chemistry and smelting, of pure gold!

His modus operandi is hard to understand. Again and again he demonstrated the pretended process, before watchful audiences, and always with seeming success. Goldsmiths examined his product, and pronounced it genuine. Perhaps he mingled gold dust in some of his chemicals which, when stirred up and heated, passed off as sublimates and left the metal behind. Perhaps he smuggled a lump of gold into his crucible at the proper time, by adroit sleight of hand. Perhaps the gold was in the vessel to start with, disguised by soluble color that made it resemble the bottom or side. In any case, he deceived princes, bishops and scientists, throughout the capitals of Europe. Only in London was he challenged, by the Masonic Lodge which said that his mystic formulas were stolen from their ritual.

Then he added the claim of a universal cure and a prolonging of life. He claimed to be immortal, to have lived for centuries, to have seen the crucifixion and other great moments of antiquity, and also told of wandering and studying in the then mysterious Orient—perhaps that latter part of the tale was true.

The administration of his "elixir of life" was accompanied by light diet, forty days of rest, and abstinence from dissipation—even if it did not lengthen the duper's life by 5557 years, as promised, it may have benefited the health of many a foolish libertine whose excesses were thus limited.

"I have found it eminently delectable to know all without studying anything," he was fond of remarking, "to dispose of the treasures of the earth without the solicitations of monarchs, to rule the elements rather than men."

Such statements seemed reasonable and informative to the scientists, and for lesser mentalities he formed a fascinating secret society for the study of "natural mysteries."

His wealth and fame grew, until he was implicated in a curious swindle—the famous Affair of the Diamond Necklace, which Alesandre Dumas has written into an entertaining novel.

Cardinal de Rohan, an ambitious but credulous churchman, fancied himself in love with Marie Antoinette, queen of France. A group of swindlers wrote him forged love-letters in the name of the queen, and finally sent to him a beautiful young woman who resembled his royal idol. The cardinal, completely deceived, gave the imposter a necklace of diamonds, worth the present-day equivalent of about half a million dollars. When the fraud was exposed, Cagliostro was accused, and brought to trial with the swindlers.

He was able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the court that he had nothing to do with the actual plundering of the cardinal, but the incident turned legal attention upon him. Some of his claims of super-science were discredited, and he left France, reduced in fortune. In Rome he was arrested on charges of practising magic and free-masonry—both crimes under the ancient church laws—and was imprisoned in a dungeon in the year 1791. He was reported dead in 1795.

The Genius of LANCELOT



"Wait!" As Thaxton went into his trance, Lancelot Biggs' hoarse whisper

BIGGS

by Nelson S. Bond

Lancelot Biggs was an unpredictable quantity, but nobody aboard the *Saturn* thought he'd ever turn traitor!



hold the captain and his men back

I SHOULD have suspected something screwy the minute Cap Hanson started talking sweetly-pie. Usually you could use his voice for a nutmeg grater. But you know me, old Drizzle-brain Donovan. If they ever write a story of my life—only why should they?—they'll title it, "Gullible's Travels."

Anyhow, about an hour after we'd lifted gravs from Long Island Spaceport, the skipper smooched into my control-turret, beaming like a nova in the Coalsack. He plumped himself into the only comfortable chair and asked:

"Well, Sparks, my lad, how you doin'?"

"If you mean," I retorted, "was I drunk last night, the answer is 'no.' I am so dry I am parched, and besides, the barkeep at the Wranglers' Club wouldn't give me any credit."

"He told me," commented the skipper, "he used your last check to vulcanize an old gum boot."

"Be that as it may," I said with quiet dignity, "I am not one of those space-hounds who gets three sheets in the ether every time he hits port!"

"An' speakin' of sheets," interrupted the Old Man, "we got more passengers aboard the *Saturn* this trip than we got bunks to flop 'em in. So—"

I got it then. I squawked, "Hey, take it easy! What is this—a hotel?"

"—so," continued the skipper imperturbably, "I'm allotin' your quarters to a special passenger. A guy by the

name of—"

"I'm not interested in names!" I howled. "I'm not the city directory. Look, Cap, I've got my rights! I don't have to turn my quarters over to some damn Earthlubber, just because he's got a yen to chase comets!"

"Will you shut up, Sparks?" snapped the skipper. "Or do I hafta calm you down with the wrong end of a lug-wrench? This here passenger's name is Thaxton, an' he comes bearin' a 'Handle With Care' label signed by Doc Challenger. Now will you pipe down?"

I would and did. Doc Challenger happens to be the president of the IPS, the corporation that owns the *Saturn*. Any friend of his is a friend of my pocketbook's.

"Well," I said, "if you're going to put it *that* way—"

"I'm puttin' this Thaxton guy," Hanson frowned, "in your quarters, on account of they're furthest from the aft holds. Friend or no friend, I ain't aimin' to have him find out we're runnin' a load of rotor-guns an' ammunition to the New California rebels."

He was right there. That was nobody's business but our own. Now, understand me. I think we had a right to help the rebels. For one thing, they deserved their independence. For another, our arch-competitors, the *Cosmos* Company, was backing the present New California overlords. A third good reason was, of course, that every day this war continued, we were losing money.

EARTH itself hadn't had a war for almost a hundred and twenty years—not since the North India uprising of '92. But the distribution of land and governmental control of the colonies was still what you might call "unfinished business."

There were always tiny local squabbles going on. Like the Fontanaland siege three years ago that damn near ruined Mars as a summer resort; the Rollie Rebellion last year on Mercury; and now, this year, the struggle for autonomy on the part of a bunch of Californian Earth colonists in the Venusian hill country.

Our freight experts had decided that of all the IPS ships, the *Saturn* would be the least likely suspect when it came to gun-running. The *Saturn* was as old as a statesman's jokes. It was the slowest, wallowingest lugger still pushing vacuum. But I agreed with Hanson, it would not do for anyone connected with the present Venus government to discover our cargo included contraband.

We'd find ourselves playing tit-tat-toe on the walls of a Sun City clink faster than a stuttering android could gargle, "Planck's Constant!"

So I nodded, "Okay, Skipper. You're right and I'm wrong, as you usually are. So what do I do now? Sleep in the galley?"

"No, Sparks. You take your duffle down to Mr. Biggs' quarters. You can bunk with him durin' this shuttle."

"What! Lancelot Biggs! You're putting me in with that perambulating pretzel? Hey, Cap—"

"You're talkin'," reminded the skipper, "about the first mate of this here tin-can—I mean, ship! Be more respectful of your superiors, Sparks. Anyhow—" He gazed at me curiously. "Anyhow, I thought you an' him was pals?"

"Pals," I moaned, "not peas in a pod! I like Mr. Biggs, Skipper. But I don't want to wear him like a hair-ribbon for the next ten days."

"Sparks!" warned the Old Man.

"Cap, you can't do this to me! It's tyranny, that's what it is!"

"Never mind what you call it!" interrupted the Old Man grimly. "I call it poetic justice. You've huttered your bread, Sparks. Now lie in it. An' while you're complainin', you might remember how aidful you was in findin' Mr. Biggs *another* bunkmate!"

He grinned vengefully and left. I remembered, then, that I'd helped Lancelot Biggs woo and win Diane, the skipper's beauteous daughter, now back on Earth making preparations for the wedding. And I groaned.

Hansons, like elephants, never forget. . . .

SO I moved in with Mr. Biggs, and it was just like I thought it would be. My gangling friend, that mad genius of the spaceways, Lancelot Biggs, was glad to have me share his quarters.

"I do hope you'll be comfortable, Sparks," he told me, gulping and making his amazing Adam's apple perform loopty-loops. "Of course, there's not any too much room—"

Which was like saying there's not any too much H₂O on Luna. There was only one hunk in Biggs' stateroom. I am a normal-sized man. Biggs is, too, only his dimensions are sort of peculiar. I. e., he's one-half as wide as par for the course, and twice as tall. Which compensates.

He turned out to have seventeen separate and distinct physical peculiarities, none of which showed up until the first time we shoehorned ourselves into the same bed. I was chagrined to learn that he had eleven elbows and seven knees. Also, his idea of resting comfortably was to spread himself out like a miniature windmill and revolve rapidly.

The first night I went sleepless. The second night I managed to doze off to a cat nap, and it almost cost me my life.

Lancelot Biggs' larynx descended suddenly and clopped me on the pate. I climbed out of bed weakly, hatched the resulting goose-egg in arnica, and spent the rest of the night studying, thoughtfully, the life history of an ancient sage known as Procrustes.

Which explains, boys and girls, why I happened to be catching forty double-winks when Cap Hanson brought Thaxton up to visit me. The first token I had of their presence was to hear a hull-o'-Bashan voice bombarading my ear-drums.

"Well, Sparks! An' what do you think *you're* doing?"

I popped out of my chair like a cork from a can of damp carbide.

I said, "Whazzat? Whozzat? Oh, you, Skipper? I was—I was thinking."

"You think," said the Old Man caustically, "awful loud, Sparks, this is Mr. Thaxton, our special guest. Mr. Thaxton, he pleased to meet our radio operator."

This Thaxton was a queer-looking duck. He wasn't more than five foot two, or maybe three. He wore a shock of bristling, caroty hair over a forehead that bulged like a sponge in a Swedish bath. His eyes stuck out so far that he could have hung pictures on them, and his legs looked like a brace of parentheses hunting for a descriptive phrase.

We clenched mitts and glims at the same time. The handshake was what I had expected from the looks of him: wet towels in the sunset. But when his eyes met mine, I got the funniest darn sensation. It was something like an electric shock, only not quite.

It was something like having your cerebellum run through a wringer, only not quite. It was a little like having tiny fingers play tag in the area of your gray-matter. Only that wasn't it, either.

I gulped and said, "In the aft—What's that?"

Because the little man had said absolutely nothing! Now, smiling faintly, he did say,

"I'm glad to meet you, Sparks. Very glad to meet you!"

LANCELOT BIGGS was there, too, and Dick Todd, our second mate. Mr. Biggs was staring at me curiously. Now he said,

"Sparks—perhaps you'd like to show Mr. Thaxton your equipment?"

"Why not?" I said. I showed him the ship's inter-communicating system, the contact controls with which we get Lunar III, the asteroid stations, and the lightships off the various planets. I showed him the dwarf Ample used to keep down excess voltage on the storage plates. I showed him all the things that make visitors "oh!" and "ah!" He "ohed!" and "ahed!" at the right time, then he asked,

"And that visiplate device? I never saw one like that before. Is that something new?"

"So new," I said, "that Mr. Biggs invented it. A urano-selenoid plate. Maybe you'd better explain its operation, Mr. Biggs. You can do it better than I can."

I meant the suggestion as a joke, because Lancelot Biggs is the most bashful man in space. But to my surprise he stepped forward, a thoughtful look on his homely puss, and began explaining the plate.

And to make a crazy situation loonier, he garbled the explanation like a woman describing a picture-show! That was unusual. Because Biggs' one motivating principle, as he had often demonstrated, was to "Get the theory first!"

But this time, while I stood baffled, while Dick Todd frowned and looked

puzzled, while Cap Hanson hemmed and hawed as restlessly as a frog on a hot griddle, Biggs stammered through an almost hopelessly tangled explanation. The way he described the operation of that audio, it would take a man approximately fourteen light years to tune in the nearest station in space.

Twice he fumbled for a word. Each time the little passenger, Thaxton, who was hanging intently on his fumbling fumbles, supplied the missing term. And when, finally, he had faltered to a conclusion:

"Well," said the visitor, "that's very interesting. Thank you very much, Lt. Biggs. And now, Captain—you were going to show me your storage holds, I believe? Didn't you say something about the aft holds?"

"Migawd, no!" said the skipper. "I mean—er—no. There's nothin' down there. We'll go visit the *for'rd* hold."

And they left. All of them, that is, but Lancelot Biggs. He made some excuse and stayed there in the control-turret with me.

Being now his bunkmate as well as his friend, I took the liberty of letting the formalities go when we were alone.

"After this, Lanse," I kidded him, "when you give a speech, you ought to pass out blueprints along with it. I wouldn't know how to operate that gadget myself from the explanation you gave. Matter of fact, I'm not sure I'll do it right the next time I try."

STRANGELY, he looked pleased.

He said, "You think so, Sparks? You really think so?"

"Granted," I said, "that I can actually think. So why the enthusiasm?"

He turned serious suddenly.

"I tried to be confusing," he said. "But even so, he learned too much. Entirely too much. Didn't you notice, Sparks, that several times when I fum-

bled for a word, he was the one who supplied it?"

"Why, darned if you're not right!" I recalled.

"And another thing—when you were first introduced to him, didn't you feel—er—peculiar? You must have. Because you started to say something—"

"I felt," I told him, "like a person in a nuthouse. I don't know why, but I felt like something inside my skull was digging for information. I almost spilled the secret of where we got the contraband hidden—"

"Not almost, Sparks," corrected Lancelot gravely. "You did! And to the worst possible person. For unless I'm greatly mistaken, that Thaxton person is a spy!"

"More than that, he's the cleverest sort of a spy. Because—he's an esper!"*

The minute he said it I knew he was right. A spy. And an Esper! Earth is lousy with 'em. Most of them are quacks. But a few—

I gasped, "But sweet shades of Io, Lanse! If he's an esper, he's sure to learn all about the cargo. From you or me or Cap or one of the crew—What in Sam Hill are we going to do about it?"

"Po?" said Lancelot Biggs.

"What? What's that?"

"Never mind. I was thinking."

"Well, think about something important!" I snapped. "Else we'll all be on the inside looking out when we reach Sun City. Why—why that redheaded little squirt will report us and then we'll all be in the soup!"

"I know," said Biggs. "That's why I wouldn't give a true explanation of

the audio unit. I didn't want him to come in here sometime while you were off duty and send Venus a message. I figured if we could gain a little time I might think of some way to—Seine?" he said querulously.

"The word you want," I said, "is 'insane'. Listen, Biggs, I've got it! We'll get this bracket-legged guy into the blasting room and—"

"Sometimes, Sparks," shuddered Maestro Marco Polo Biggs delicately, "I wonder what strange chemistry goes on in that brain of yours. Of course we can't use violence. In the first place, if we did, the Venusian authorities would *know* something was wrong, confiscate our ship and goods, ignoring our navicert,* interne us—"

"If we don't," I reminded him gloomily, "they'll do all them things anyway. And maybe give us two slaps on the wrist for good measure. With a crowbar."

"Knowledge!" said Biggs feverishly. "Knowledge is the answer to all problems. It's right on the tip of my mind, but I can't quite grasp it. Mississ—nol Thames? No!"

"Thames and tide," I punned, "wait for no man. Oh, go 'way, will you please? I've got things to do. But quick!"

SO he went away, and I snapped on the old powerhouse and pretty soon current hummed and sang through the coils and I made the ether vibrate. And I do mean vibrate.

I contacted Joe Marlowe at Lunar III, Joe being not only one of the best hug-pounders in the business but also a personal friend. And I asked him to find out, (1) if this bozo Thaxton was really a friend of Doc Challenger's, (2)

* In the world of Lancelot Biggs, an esper is a man who makes his living telling fortunes. This he is able to do through his ability to make use of extra-sensory perception, the psychological phenomenon discovered by Dr. J. B. Rhine of Duke University, and outlined in his book "New Frontiers of the Mind."—Ed.

* A navicert is a navigation and transport permit issued by foreign consular authorities for space travel. Here, the Venusian consulate on Earth certified the *Saturn's* passage.—Ed.

if there'd been any leak on Earth about our gun-running exploits, and (3) if there were hot and cold running water in Venusian hoosegows.

Pretty soon the answer came back.

"No, no, a thousand times no." After which Joe asked me, on our private conversation band,

"What's all this about somebody named Thaxton?"

So I told him. So it turned out that Thaxton was aboard the *Saturn* on forged papers in the first place, and that in the second place we couldn't clap him in irons even if he were a secret agent of the Venusian government, and that in the third place we shouldn't have let ourselves get in such a jam to begin with.

"Besides," tapped Joe, "all you've got to do is to keep your collective mouths shut. You're running under a navicert, and that means you won't be inspected at Sun City. You'll be free to make a short hop to New California and leave the aft hold cargo with the assigned parties." And with that he signed off.

A moment later the door busted open and in came Cap Hanson, his face the color of an uncleared pullet. He bawled,

"Sparks! Sparks, for gosh sakes' get in touch with Earth immediately, if not sooner! Find out what we're to do! That there Thaxton guy, he's a phony. A—"

"Park it, Cap," I said glumly, "and hear the rest. He's a spy. And he's also an esper."

"You—you knew?"

"Mr. Biggs guessed it an hour ago. We talked the situation over."

Then I told him about calling Joe Marlowe, and went on to detail the hopelessness of our situation. But Hanson is a fighting man. He flinched as I threw verbal lefts and rights at him,

but he was still sparring feely when the bell rang.

He came up with, "Well, then, get in touch with Chief Garrity. Tell him to turn this crate around. We'll go back to Earth—"

Came the dawn! "Right!" I yelled. "Right!"

At that moment a voice spoke from the doorway.

"No, gentlemen," said the mysterious Mr. Thaxton, "that is just what you will *not* do! You will continue on to Venus, that your perfidy may be properly punished!"

IT'S funny how the mind works. There at that moment when I should have been taking a swindle into the chilly waters of despair, do you know what I found myself thinking?

I was thinking, "Gosh, what swell alliteration! I'd like to hear him say: 'Peter Piper picked a peck of—'"

Then Cap Hanson risked apoplexy with a roar that lifted furniture.

"What! What, sir, do you mean by issuing commands to me in my own space ship? By what authority—?"

The diminutive esper glanced meaningfully at the pierce-gun in his right hand.

"This is my authority, Captain. It will suffice until you and your crew can be turned over to the soldiery of the Venusian government. And—

"Ah, Mr. Biggs! You're just in time to join our little party. No—if you please! Don't make it necessary for me to—er—take drastic measures. Be kind enough to raise your hands and walk across the room—so!"

Biggs had, in his customary ambling, stork-on-roller-skates fashion, stumbled into the room with nothing on his mind but hair. And had thus fallen an easy victim to our "guest's" holdup. Now, dazedly, he searched our faces for an explanation.

I shrugged. "Don't look at me," I told him. "I've got as many ideas as a broken down college professor."

Cap Hanson renewed his attack on Thaxton.

"You're a fool," he snarled, "to think you can get away with this! Why, blast you, it's still five days to Sun City! You don't think you can hold us at the point of a gun for five days, do you?"

Thaxton smiled negligently.

"It won't be necessary to do that, Captain. I'm afraid you underestimate the Intelligence Bureau and the resources of the present Venusian government. The one"—he hinted malevolently—"you are trying to overthrow.

"When the *Saturn* prepared to leave Earth, I suspected it might be the transport for contraband. I became a passenger, as you will subsequently learn, by—"

"Forging papers," I sneered. "An ethical practice in your profession."

Instead of getting red, he took it as a compliment.

"Ah, you've already learned that? Congratulations, Sparks! I didn't know you had such depths of perspicacity."

"I haven't!" I told him indignantly. "But I still know a phony when I see one!"

"To continue," Thaxton smirked, "I made arrangements with the *Cyclops*, finest space cruiser of the Venusian navy, to intercept this ship at a point halfway between the two planets. Thus, you see—"

"Amazon?" said Biggs. "Wangpoo?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Biggs?" Thaxton appeared puzzled.

I said, "Don't mind him, Thaxton. He's our triple-fret man. You were saying—"

I WAS stalling desperately for time. Confucius say, "Wise guy who shoot

off trap sometimes spring same for self." Rope was the one thing I wanted Thaxton to have the most of. For Q.E.D. reasons.

"Thus, you see," he continued pleasantly, "within the next hour or two, the *Cyclops* will keep its rendezvous in space with the *Saturn*. And at that time, gentlemen, it will be my great pleasure to seize this ship, interne its crew, and take over its cargo as contraband—No, Sparks! There's no use trying to reach that audio!"

I fell back, abashed. I stammered,

"But—but how did you know I—"

Lancelot Biggs answered quietly,

"Sparks, didn't I tell you he's an esper?"

I stared at Thaxton. I said,

"Is—is that right? Did you really read my thoughts?"

"You might call it that," he said amusedly. "At any rate, I divined your purpose through my gift of extra-sensory perception. The gift that"—he preened himself, the handy-legged little rooster—"that makes me the Number One secret agent of the Venusian Intelligence Bureau."

I said savagely, "If you can read my thoughts, why don't you go there?"

But Thaxton was through with pleasantries. To Cap Hanson he said,

"And now, Captain, that we may not again be interrupted, this time by a more capable intruder"—that swift, mocking grin at L. Biggs—"I must ask you to call the bridge, the engine room, the holds. Tell every member of the crew and command to remain just where he is at the present time. And make it forceful!"

He "made it forceful" himself by jabbing the hand-gun into Cap Hanson's lachrymose. And since Hanson isn't an idiot, he did as he was told. He moved to the audio, spoke the necessary com-

mands.

Dick Todd was puzzled, but said, "Aye, sir!"

The chief engineer, Garrity, replied dourly with, "Did ye think I'd be leavin' my post in midflight, Captain Hanson?"

And the black gang foreman merely said, "Very well, sir!"

Lancelot Biggs was still muttering to himself. I was beginning to get worried about Biggs. He had a bad case of water on the brain, apparently.

He kept saying, "Nile? Red? Saar?"

Cap Hanson had finished his calls. Anyway, that's what he thought. Thaxton thought differently.

"If you don't mind, Captain," he reminded him. "Give the same message to the chief steward. We don't want any mess-hoys or waiters interrupting our little tête-à-tête. Too many cooks, you know—" And he grinned.

"Hal!" growled the skipper. "Hal I'd gladly laugh at your funeral, Thaxton."

But he called the mess hall, and the voice of our Cockney steward, Doug Enderby drifted back over the audio cheerfully.

"Aye, sir! Stay put, sir? Right as ryne!"

Then we all jumped. Because a great shout broke from the scrawny throat of Lancelot Biggs.

"That's it!" he yelled. "*That's it!*"

FOR a moment it was touch and go. Thaxton's forefinger tightened ominously on the trigger of his pierce-gun, and I found myself wondering how I'd look with a hemstitched abdomen. Then, as Biggs shouted no more, a look of curiosity spread over the little man's features.

"Might I inquire, Mr. Biggs—" he began.

Biggs' face was red. He looked embarrassed at his outburst. He glanced

sheepishly at the skipper and at me.

"I—I'm sorry. But I've been wondering how I could—" He faltered. "Well, anyway, I just thought of a way. That is—if you're agreeable?"

Thaxton's bug eyes goggled at him.

"Speak sense, man!" he ordered pettishly. "How you could *what?* A way to *what?* If I'm agreeable to *what?*"

Biggs drew a deep breath. Then, carefully,

"Well, here's my thought. I'm planning to be married very soon, Mr. Thaxton. I have no desire whatsoever to be incarcerated in a Venusian jail—especially for participation in something over which I have no control. It was my thought, my hope, that in consideration for services rendered, you might agree to give me my liberty—"

Once upon a time there was something redder than Cap Hanson's face. But it exploded. So did the skipper.

"Traitor!" he bellowed. "Why, you dirty, sneaking lowdown space viper! Selling us out, are you? *I'll* show you!"

And he made a dive for Señor Biggs. But Thaxton, interested now, stepped between them, forced the skipper back.

To Biggs he said, "Your proposition is not impossible, Lieutenant. But might I ask what you have to offer?"

Biggs said, "When you men board the *Saturn*, a long search awaits them, doesn't it? They'll have to comb the entire ship looking for the contrahand."

Thaxton sniffed. "Thanks to your stupid friend, the radioman," he said, "we know the contrahand is stored in the aft section of the ship."

"But there are many bins in the aft section," Biggs pleaded. "I can spare you the trouble of searching them all. I'll tell you which ones to look in—if you'll grant me full pardon. I—I might even be willing to accept service in your army."

"The Venusian army uses traitors,"

said Thaxton pointedly, "but it does not employ them. However, I think your suggestion has merit. It's a bargain, Biggs. And we might as well take care of that little matter right now. So if you'll just tell me the bin number—"

"I'll kill you, Biggs!" bowled the skipper. "One more word and I'll cut out your heart and eat it for breakfast!"

But his words fell on deaf ears. For as if the syllables couldn't tumble past his lips fast enough, Biggs was blurting out,

"Bins Number 13, 14 and 15, Mr. Thaxton. The first two are filled with ammunition; the last contains rotor guns, grenades and two field pieces—"

IT was at that moment that hope finally deserted me. True, Lancelot Biggs' actions had been strange, and he had seemed eager to sell us out, to save his own skin. But I had been withholding judgment—because I knew, or thought I knew, something of the genius in Biggs. I had been hoping against hope that his pose was only a ruse calculated to lull Thaxton's suspicions; so that somehow, by some trick, everything might turn out well.

But when he told the numbers of those bins, I knew at last, and with a sickening sense of distaste for all mankind, that Lancelot Biggs—my one-time friend and bunkmate—had failed under pressure. He was a traitor! Because he told the exact truth. The guns and ammunition were exactly where he had told Thaxton!

Cap Hanson was looking at Biggs as if he were some kind of slimy snail. Cap made a faint rubbing gesture, and spat. Biggs' eyes sought mine—but I refused to meet them. For a long moment there was silence, then Thaxton said,

"And how do I know you're telling

the truth, Biggs?"

"But—but I am!" protested Biggs. His lanky legs gangled; there was sweat on his forehead. He was an abject picture of fear and treachery.

"You know I—"

"I know nothing about you," said Thaxton crisply. "For all I know, the bins you mention may be designed in such a fashion as to explode if anyone opens them. If so—"

Sudden hope leaped into Biggs' eyes. He bleated,

"But—but you're an esper, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course. What has that to do with it?"

Biggs said triumphantly, "Well, then, now that you know which bins to concentrate on, can't you probe into them with your thoughts? Find out for yourself?" He added, "I—I always heard that really good espers could guess what was inside sealed boxes."

The little spy bridled.

"Not guess, Biggs!" he snapped. "Know! That is a good idea. Perhaps you're sincere. Well, it won't take long to find out."

Still holding the gun upon us rigidly, Thaxton went into his act. His body stiffened slightly. His pop-eyes seemed to bulge even more. His forehead creased with a sort of strain. His lips moved faintly.

I could hear the words as his unusual sense of perception bridged for him the distance between this turret and the after holds.

"Ah, the bins! Numbers 13, 14, 15. In the first I see boxes. Boxes filled with ammunition. Ah, yes! In the next I see—"

Then a thought, so dazzling that it almost short-circuited, blazed across my brain. I nudged Cap Hanson and nodded toward Thaxton. In that state of half-catalepsy, he was almost vulner-

able. There was a fighting chance that we might be able to dash across the room, knock him down, yank that gun from his hand before he got us. Or, at least, both of us.

HANSON got my meaning immediately. His big fists balled at his sides. I felt his shoulder tense against mine. And then—

"No!" whispered Biggs sibilantly. "That doesn't help, Skipper! The *Cyclops* will be here any minute, now!"

"—ammunition," droned Thaxton. "Boxes piled to the ceiling. Ah! And in the third bin—"

"Out of my way, you gutless wonder!" rasped Hanson viciously. "Let them come! If we die, we die like men!"

"But," said Lancelot Biggs quietly, "we don't die!" And calmly, easily, almost tenderly, he raised his voice.

"I speak to you, Thaxton," he said in the soothing tone of a parent. "Do you hear me? Do you hear me speak?"

"—two hundred rotor guns," said Thaxton. "Three cartons of fuse-caps, one carton of— Yes, I hear you speak."

"That is well," said Biggs. "Listen, Thaxton, and do as I say. In a few minutes you—"

He spoke swiftly. It is well that he did so, for it was scant seconds after he had finished that the inter-communicating system buzzed loudly. I flashed in the audio and stared into the panicky face of Lt. Dick Todd.

"Sparks!" he yelled. "Is the skipper there? Tell him to come up here right away! There's a Venusian ship off our port bow. It just fired a shot across our bow and ordered us to heave to!"

Biggs said apologetically, "If you'll permit me, sir?" and the skipper nodded mutely. "Todd," said Mr. Biggs, "heave to as ordered. And when they

board us, send them to this room."

Five minutes later, the commander of the S. S. *Cyclops* hustled into the control-turret, side-arms ready and backed by a hard-bitten foray party, to find a strange bit of activity.

Lancelot Biggs and I were playing a game of chess. Cap Hanson was playfully disconnecting the wires of my transmitting unit. Thaxton was sitting on top of the visiphone equipment, teasing my Ampie with a flashlight battery.

"You're all," yelled the commander, "under arrest! Er—I hope." And to Thaxton, uncertainly, "Well, Thaxton?"

The little man smiled at him cherubically.

"Very well, Commander," he piped. "And you?"

Cap Hanson, carefully coached by Biggs, stood up, bridling.

"May I ask," he said stuffily, "the reason for this invasion? My dear sir, such an unwarranted entry—"

The *Cyclops* commander looked stunned. He dragged a moist hand across a moister forehead and said,

"Thaxton, did you complete your investigations?"

Thaxton looked up, bobbed his head. "Mm-hmm!" he said. "Woo—woo!"

"And—and the result?"

"She wouldn't." Thaxton shook his head regretfully. "When I got insistent, she slapped my face—"

"You infernal idiot!" roared the Venusian commander. "I'm talking about the cargo! Did you or did you not find contraband aboard this ship? If you did—!"

They could have filled two stratosphere balloons with the breath that was held at that moment. But then the little man broke the spell. Broke? Shattered. Into ten thousand tiny pieces. For he said,

"Contraband, Commander? Oh,

mercy me, not. Whatever made you think there'd be contraband aboard *this ship?*" And he slid off the visi-phone unit, to announce:

"Well, we'd better be going now, hadn't we? Thanks for a pleasant trip, Captain Hanson. I hope I'll see you again some time."

THE VENUSIAN commander's face was crimson, but he was a gentleman. To Hanson he said,

"My apologies, Captain. I hope you'll understand that in times of war, such incidents as this are unavoidable. My government will make a formal apology to yours."

Then he, and his men, and his ship, and Thaxton—the dopey little squirt—were gone. And we were free to continue our journey. With all mental strain forever relieved. Because now we had the *carte blanche* of the Venusian government. . . .

Afterward, it was a crestfallen skipper who held out his hand to Lancelot Biggs in open-hearted apology.

"I'm sorry, Biggs," he said frankly. "I was completely wrong. I might have known that the man who could win my daughter wouldn't be the kind to fold up in a tight spot. But I—I—"

He choked up. Biggs said,

"That's all right, Skipper. I had to do it that way. It's the only way I could get him off guard."

Which was my cue. I said,

"Yeah, come clean, pal. Would you mind giving it the once-over-lightly for my benefit? Maybe I'm slow on the draw, but it's all still a deep, dark mystery to me. You hypnotized Thaxton, made him tell his superior we were as clean as a whale's ears. But how? And when did you figure out—"

"It was simple," explained Biggs, "once I got the clue. Back in the twentieth century, when the science of

extra-sensory perception was in its infancy, they discovered among other things that the best natural 'espers' are hyperthyroids.

"Thaxton was a hyper-thyroid. The bulging brow, the pop-eyes, the nervousness—all these indicated that. And I remembered, too, the curious fact discovered by an early experimenter in telepathy that the 'esper', while working at his trade, is wide open to hypnosis.

"Being in a receptive frame of mind, it is only natural that an accomplished hypnotist—" "

"So you're that, too," I said, "among other things!"

"I understand the rudiments of the art," Biggs grinned. "Once I got him under control, it was easy to implant the belief that he had been through the entire ship, found nothing amiss. He will never know otherwise. I expunged the memory of the entire interlude from his brain."

I said thoughtfully, "Which isn't a bad idea, if you ask me. Say, Biggs, can you do that to everyone? I've owed Enderhy five credits for the past month. If you can help me forget it, it won't worry me nearly so much."

"Or," said the skipper caustically, "make Enderhy forget it. On account of he ain't never gonna be paid nuthow. Well, Mr. Biggs, let's you an' me get back to work."

"Wait!" I pleaded. "One more thing. Why did you keep muttering names to yourself, Biggs? And why did you holler, 'That's it!' when Enderhy mentioned the rain?"

"HE said 'tyne,'" Biggs told me, "not 'rain'. That was the word I'd been seeking. I knew it was the name of a river—but I couldn't think which one. Now, Prof. J. B. Rhine
(Concluded on page 132)

The Man Who Came Back



Even though you
intend to bring a man back to life,
killing him is murder, according to law!



By RICHARD O. LEWIS

"I KILLED him," said Dr. Williams.

"You what?" I stood there staring.

Dr. Williams, tall and somber in his white cloak, looked more like a ghoul than the city's leading physician as he stood there in the dim light of his inner office, with the shelves of surgical equipment at his back.

The silent figure of Gregg Stone lay on the table before him.

"Yes." Williams nodded his gray head, his dark, sunken eyes gazing across the table into mine. "I killed him. In the interest of science."

"Man!" I gasped. "You must be crazy! Why—why, that's murder!"

"Stone wanted it that way," said the doctor. "And so I electrocuted him."

I was completely baffled. Only a few minutes ago, Williams had called me on the phone, urging me to come to his office as soon as possible. I had arrived to find young Gregg Stone dead. And now Williams was telling me that he had killed the man—and that it was Stone's idea.

The doctor must have read the bewilderment in my face. "The animator!" He indicated a glass cabinetlike affair that lay flat upon another table near one side of the room. It was about eight feet long by three wide, and had various controls along one side.

"The great experiment is at hand!" Williams exclaimed.

I felt the hair at the back of my neck prickle as full significance swept through me.

I had seen that cabinet often enough before. Gregg Stone, the young medical student who now lay dead before

me, had thought out every last detail of the animator, had constructed the greater part of it with his own hands.

Many times, Dr. Williams and I had helped Stone with his experiments here in Williams' inner office. Time after time, we had electrocuted rats and cats—and even dogs—and had watched them slowly return to life within the confines of the glass cabinet.

It was not difficult to see the possibilities of the animator. It could save mankind from death! With it and the recent advances made in the sciences of medicine and surgery, no man would need to die—not until he was ready to do so, at least.

If a man died from heart disease, for instance, it would be but a comparatively simple task to give him a new heart while he was still dead—then place him in the animator and bring him back to life, none the worse for the experience.

Theoretically, at least. It had not as yet been tried on man. Only the lesser animals. But now....

I looked down at the relaxed face of Gregg Stone. He was young. Hardly more than twenty. And in love. Yet he had permitted himself to be killed, in order that he might prove to the world that his cabinet could restore life after death.

"What about Bessie?" I wanted to know. Bessie was Stone's girl.

Dr. Williams went to the cabinet and began making certain last-minute adjustments.

"Bessie is on her way here now," he said over his shoulder. "She will arrive by plane sometime this afternoon. Stone wanted the experiment to be completed by that time, wanted to be in a position to marry her immediately."

"But surely Bessie would wait." I knew her to be a fine, sensible girl and very much in love with Stone.

"You forget that youth is impetuous," said Williams. "Gregg had two years left for his medical course. After that would come internship and, after that, the lean years of establishing a practice." Williams shook his head. "And, to youth in love, five or six years can be an eternity!"

"Just the same," I said stubbornly, "you should not have permitted him to go through with it."

WILLIAMS turned from his work to look at me squarely.

"Gregg Stone is not the first man to risk his life for science," he said evenly.

"That is true," I admitted. "But I hope you realize just what this will mean to you if the experiment is not a success."

"The police have already been informed. Sergeant McKinley should be here any minute now." His dark eyes were boring questioningly into mine. "And just what gave you the idea that the experiment might be other than a success?"

I had the answer ready for him.

"Because you are dealing with man now. And man is different from all other animals. *Man has a soul!*"

"That is debatable," Williams shot back. "In all my surgical探ings within the human body, I have never run across anything that would—"

There came a loud thumping at the door of the outer office.

"Sergeant McKinley," said Williams. "Let him in before he knocks all the glass out of the door."

But the man at the door was not the big, even-tempered McKinley; it was Patrolman O'Neal, the toughest cop in the precinct. A hard-headed stickler for duty!

He came barging into the inner office, his cold gray eyes darting from Williams to the inert form of Gregg

Stone on the table.

"Sergeant McKinley sent me over here when he was called out to investigate a burglary," O'Neal announced huskily.

Then his face went hard as he saw that Stone was dead.

"All right, now," he ground out. "An' who is this man? An' who killed him?"

"The man is Gregg Stone, medical student," said Williams. "And I killed him."

"Oh, you did, eh?" O'Neal snapped. "Well, let we warn you," he said in his harsh routine manner, "that anything you say here may be used against you. Now, you better come along to headquarters."

"O'Neal." I placed my hand on his shoulder. "You must understand that this is a scientific experiment. Stone died willingly. Doctor Williams and I are going to attempt to bring him back to life."

"So!" He wheeled about. "You're also in on this deal with him. Maybe you'd better come along, too."

"Dr. James had nothing to do with this," Williams told him. "He arrived only a few minutes ahead of you. I accept full responsibility if Stone is not alive within the next fifteen minutes."

"A dead man is a dead man," O'Neal insisted. "An' the man what killed him is a murderer!"

I knew that beneath Patrolman O'Neal's crusty exterior there lurked a devout, religious nature, a religious nature coupled with an understandable ambition for promotion in the department.

I tried to cover both angles at the same time.

"Just think, O'Neal," I said. "Within fifteen minutes, you will have aided in a great scientific experiment. You will have helped save a human life! I can just see the headlines: 'Patrolman

O'Neal helps to bring about scientific miracle!' Why, they'll have to make you a sergeant for a deed like that!"

That got him. He pushed his cap back, scratched his head with stubby fingers.

"Well, now—since you put it that way—I—Well, this is—un—unusual—" His heavy face went suddenly hard again. "I'll give you just fifteen minutes," he said. "An' if Stone is still dead—"

BUT Williams and I already had Gregg Stone in our arms and were carrying him to the other table. We put him down gently into the cabinet.

"An' if either of you tries any tricks—" O'Neal touched the hilt of his service revolver significantly.

Williams made the necessary adjustments, closed the glass lid of the cabinet and sealed it. Then he went to the controls.

I stood looking down through the glass at Stone's lifeless face. Here was a man who was gambling for fame and the love of a girl against death. A love as great as that should be rewarded.

But would it be?

I was fearful. There was still one thing that was worrying me. Stone's soul! What would happen to it? After the soul had once parted from the body, could it return? And, if so, would the soul's memory of the hereafter haunt its owner through life?

I felt that Dr. Williams was attempting something that should be left to a greater power, felt that he was overstepping the rights that had been given mankind. . . .

A slight hiss told me that the cabinet was being filled with oxene, a rapid, cell-healing agent that Gregg Stone had compounded months before.

I saw the dead man's chest rise and fall rhythmically as the respirator was

turned on. And I also knew that his heart was being stimulated—electrically, and in another rhythmic cycle.

I looked at my watch. As near as I could judge, Stone had been dead approximately forty-five minutes. In another ten or fifteen minutes—

Stone lay there in the animator, his eyes closed and his chest rising and falling regularly. Any moment now, I expected to see him smile and begin to move about.

Williams' hollow eyes had never left the dead man's face for an instant. O'Neal stood at my side, a nervous hand rubbing his heavy jaw.

More minutes dragged by.

I glanced at my watch again. Fourteen minutes! Stone should certainly be showing signs of life by now! It had never taken over ten minutes for any of the animals we had experimented with.

Williams' lean face was drawn. Tiny beads of perspiration were beginning to show on his pale forehead. Obviously, he was conscious of the length of time it was taking, was becoming worried.

O'Neal must have sensed that something was wrong. He looked over into the glass cabinet.

"He's still dead," he announced. "Maybe—maybe I should make a report or something—"

I felt sorry for O'Neal. He was struggling desperately between uncertainty and a well-developed sense of duty.

And I also felt sorry for Williams, Stone and Bessie. In another few minutes the oxene would begin to burn lung tissue! It had happened several times before in our experiments. Would it happen this time?

Williams shot a quick glance at me. His thin lips were white. The strain was beginning to tell upon him.

"Seventeen minutes," I told him.

He nodded, slowed down the respirator to save lung tissue, stepped up the electrical stimulation to the heart.

O'NEAL shifted his weight from one foot to the other, cleared his throat. It was plain to see that he had lost all confidence in the cabinet.

I was looking down at the dead man's face. For some reason, a strange idea began to possess me.

I felt that Stone was not coming back, that he didn't want to come back!

The more I looked at him, the more certain I became that I was right. *Stone was fighting us!*

"The lung tissue," I said. "It can't last much longer!"

Hope was fading from Dr. Williams' lean ascetic face. He slowed down the respiration still further, his eyes intent for any change in the inert man. He seemed dazed. Time and time again, he had brought dead animals back to life; but now, in his first attempt with man, he was failing.

I knew that Williams was giving no thought to himself; he was thinking only of Gregg Stone—and Bessie.

O'Neal cleared his throat for the *nth* time.

"You can't do nothin' after a man is dead," he told Williams. "You come along with me. I think you need a doctor yourself."

Williams glared at him a brief moment.

"Can't you see a man's life is at stake! I've got to bring him back!"

"A dead man is a dead man," reasoned O'Neal. He put a heavy hand upon Williams' drooped shoulder.

"I hate to do this. But I gotta take you down to headquarters."

I saw the doctor's fingers flash to the rheostat that controlled the heartbeat, saw him step it up a notch in a last at-

tempt. And Stone's heart was already hammering against his ribs with force enough to tear that organ apart!

"Come along," said O'Neal.

"Wait!" My eyes had caught the slight twitch of a muscle at the corner of Stone's mouth. "Look!"

Williams, too, saw the nerve twitch. He slowed down the heartbeat, his hands light and deft upon the controls—as well they might be when toying with that uncertain thing called life.

For the miracle was happening! Stone was returning from the dead!

The three of us stood there tense, hardly daring to breathe. Life was beginning to unfold before us. The muscles at the corners of Stone's lips were quivering. His eyelids fluttered open once; and closed again, tightly.

"The saints be praised!" muttered O'Neal in profound reverence.

But I was far from ready to praise anything. Something was happening to Stone's face, something that sent a shiver down my spine. His lips were drawing back from his teeth in thin, straight lines. His eyes were being held tightly shut, like those of a man who has been rudely wakened from a pleasant dream and who is trying desperately to go back, to repair the broken thread.

His jaws clamped. His face became blotched with red. Every muscle of his body quivered, tense with strain.

Stone was fighting, fighting with every ounce of energy in his young body. I realized that he was not fighting for life; he was fighting against it!

But his fight was useless against the animator his own genius had constructed. Under Williams' deft hands, the animator was bringing him back.

A violent tremor coursed through Stone's body and his eyes flashed suddenly open. And I saw within their gray depths something akin to insanity.

It was ghastly!

Williams sent the glass lid of the cabinet flying open with a touch of his fingers.

GREGG STONE jerked up to a sitting position, his eyes darting crazily from one to the other of us, his lips working as if he were trying to speak—and couldn't.

A quick leap carried him from the cabinet to the floor, where he turned to face us again.

"Fools!" he shouted at us. "Fools!"

He was temporarily insane. There was no doubt of that.

He stood there swaying on his feet, his eyes dilated.

"I didn't want to come back!" he screamed. "Can't you understand! I didn't want—"

He closed his eyes and held his head in his hands as bitter sohs racked his body.

O'Neal was the first of us to gain his senses. He leaped toward Stone and took him by the arm.

"Now, now, my boy," he soothed. "Take it easy. Everything is all right an—"

Stone's eyes blazed open. He saw the uniformed man before him, saw the gun at O'Neal's belt. With the strength of a madman, he tore himself loose from O'Neal's grasp, ripped the service revolver from its holster and sent the bulky patrolman spinning away to one side.

The gun in Stone's hand trembled from one to the other of us.

"I am going back!" he shouted. "I am going back, you hear? And you can't make me return this time!"

"Think of your achievement!" It was my own voice trying to make itself heard. "Think of Bessie! Remember! She'll be here soon—"

My words were drowned out by the

roar of the revolver. Glass splintered and tinkled about the room as five slugs smashed in quick succession through the animator, shattering it beyond repair.

The smoking gun in Stone's hand turned quickly on his own head. After destroying every possibility of being once again revived, he was going to take his own life!

His lips moved. "I am coming back!" But he wasn't speaking to us—he was talking to something or some one we couldn't see!

O'Neal had gained his wits and was racing across the room.

I knew he would be too late. Stone's white finger was already squeezing the trigger—and there was something else, something no man could stop.

I saw the sudden pallor that flooded Stone's face, saw the strange look that had replaced the glaring madness of his eyes. And I knew what had happened. *Stone's heart had ceased its beating!*

I realized that I had been expecting it all along. Even the animals that had been revived in the animator had to be kept quiet for a day or two after the ordeal, to give their hearts a chance to rest.

Stone's heart had taken terrific punishment in the animator. The following struggle and excitement had taxed it still more, had taxed it to the breaking

point.

He slumped to the floor and the gun clattered at his side as the flying O'Neal bumped into him.

O'Neal was kneeling by the fallen man, his eyes wide, his heavy face pale.

"Why, I—I killed him!" he gasped.

I went forward and placed a hand on the patrolman's shoulder.

"No, O'Neal," I said. "You didn't kill him. I will attest to that. He was dead before you reached him. His heart"

ALL of us became conscious presently of the loud knocking on the outer office door.

A moment later, Dr. Williams returned to the room, an opened telegram in his hands.

"For Stone?" I asked. For I knew now that Gregg Stone had been in another world, and any message to him would be an ironic aftermath.

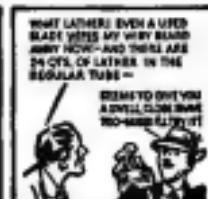
Williams nodded. I looked again at Stone's face. It was relaxed and peaceful, the face of a sleeping man who has once again caught the thread of a pleasant dream.

Suddenly, everything became quite clear to me. I turned to Williams.

"She—she—"

"Yes," said Williams. "Bessie was killed not over an hour ago when her plane crashed."

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SABOTAGE ON MARS
(Concluded from page 89)

swung it along the shadowy desert horizon. Below, in the lab, I heard the doors splinter sickeningly and give. Lucy's gun barked and there were cries and shouts.

Then through the telescope I caught sight of what I was looking for—the distant war games battleground. I could see the brilliant flares that lit the scene, the exploding ground mines, the swiftly moving tanks, the tracer bullets, and the infantry coming up behind. It was all practice, of course, a test of men and machines. But it would serve my purpose.

I picked out a tank moving in the proper direction in relation to me. I centered the telescope on it, then yanked down the lever that worked Walters' transporter.

Things happened—fast! The whole apparatus jumped into bowling life. A pale beam shot from the tube above the telescope, licked out toward the distant battleground. And then suddenly there was a great alien crash of sound down on the lab floor: the roaring of a motor, the metallic clatter of furiously moving caterpillar treads, the staccato stuttering of a thermite machine gun!

I reached the railing just in time to see the tank, fire spitting from its guns, roll across the clearing like an iron boulder and smash through the door where the gorillas were breaking in. Yes, it happened that quick, before the tank driver, surprised at suddenly finding himself in a strange place, could stop his crate; before the gunner could silence his weapon.

It was so blamed simple, I decided not to take any chances. I hopped back to the telescope, and in an instant another tank was crashing through the big door down on the lab floor. I fig-

ured that should have pretty well taken the pep out of Marcia's gang.

But just in case there happened to be stray "gardeners" lurking in the bushes outside, I centered the telescope on a platoon of charging soldiers, and yanked the lever. Downstairs sounded the thump of metal-shod feet, lusty battle cries and then hoarse shouts and curses of amazement.

By the time I looked over the railing, soldiers were filling the place like scurrying ants. I shot a glance over at the switchboard where Lucy and her Dad were.

Apparently the old duffer had forgotten the bullet hole in his shoulder, the bump on his head, and the pain in his stomach. He was standing up, jaw swinging like the scoop of a steam shovel. Lucy stood at his side.

But Lucy wasn't looking at the confused soldiers or the spot where our late enemies had been. She was gazing up at me, and even at that distance I could see that her big blue eyes were shining.

I waved my hand. "The Marines have landed!" I yelled. "The situation is well in hand!"

Then I was going down those steel stairs three at a time. In another moment I was at the switchboard, and in another second I had Lucy in my arms. . . .

I felt a tap on my shoulder after a bit, and I turned around to face a perspiring, sarcastic infantry captain.

"If you don't mind," he said, "what the hell is this all about?"

"Just a little game of 'atom,'" I explained. I put my arm around Lucy's waist. "And this is Eve. And over there—"

I took a look around and finally found Marcia, struggling like all seven furies with a couple of burly soldiers.

"Over there," I nodded, "is the snake."

The Amazon

by

THORNTON
AYRE

The Amazon's free hand leveled her weapon while her other held the struggling thug aloft



Fights Again

Chris Wilson and the Golden Amazon found themselves in serious trouble on Venus when Vi's supernatural strength suddenly deserted her

"FOLKS, there is a simply terrific reception here tonight—and well there ought to be! Thanks to the activities of Violet Ray and Chris Wilson, a bacteria plague has been stamped out. Maybe it wasn't the end of crime in a big way, but it sure was a swell help.

"Least we can do is thank the newly married couple for the work they did. . . .

"Flash! The banquet has started. The president of American Science Headquarters is giving his vote of thanks right now. Hang onto your visiplates, folks, while we look them over in a close-up shot."

Practically every watching eye in

America surveyed the mirrored scene of a vastly long table. Telescopic eyes on the television transmitters moved up to short focus, to reveal the sensitive, clean-cut features of the Earth-born, Venus-reared girl whom all the world and the solar system called "the Golden Amazon."

Every detail of the girl's burnished, tawny skin, black hair and intensely dark blue eyes showed on the countless visiplates. Beside her sat the dark-haired, thoughtful-eyed young man who had finally won her heart—Chris Wilson, the ex-lunar surveyor and now ad-



venturer-at-large.

Finally the president of American Science Headquarters got to the end of his peroration. Dramatically he raised his glass.

"To Violet Ray—or rather, Wilson," he added heartily. Vi and Chris had just been married.

The toast was drunk by the tremendous assembly of men and women scientists and public figures—then all eyes swung to the girl.

Vi got to her feet, the picture of embarrassment.

"Unaccustomed as I am—" she began, and then her amber-tinted cheeks flushed very red indeed. She started again.

"Laymen and gentleadies . . ." The distinguished crowd started to titter, and then everybody began to applaud and chuckle in good-natured fun.

Vi looked like a one-girl tableau of beauty in distress. She glanced appealingly at Chris and then sank limply into her chair. Crime Vi could stand up to—but speeches!

Chris, grinning hugely, got to his feet.

"I am afraid, my good friends, that my pretty but two-fisted young wife is not much of a woodsman—when it comes to splitting infinitives!"

Everybody held his breath for a moment, and then there was a mounting chorus of sheepish laughs as the pun went home.

"But seriously, friends," Chris resumed, "although you are honoring us tonight for our efforts in smashing a vicious crime ring, let me remind you that this ring has been attacked at only one point. The rest of this brutal gang is still in existence."

"In this year 2060, when the marvels of science are seemingly without end, let us remember that unscrupulous forces are unquestionably at work to rob

us of the fruits of our genius. Against such criminals, Vi and I pledge ourselves to continue the battle until the last vestiges of crime have been wiped out! We thank you."

Chris made Vi rise and take a bow as the room rang with cheers.

Then the banquet began in earnest. From the sounds that rose from the tables, it was painfully obvious that the Science president's lengthy speech had made a lot of folks go hungry. After the mad clatter of cutlery had finally begun to subside, Dr. Grant Murray, sitting opposite Vi and Chris, wiped his sleek jowls with his napkin and grunted with paunchy contentment.

"Ahem!" The famous American scientist tossed back his gray mane by way of introduction. "Mrs. Wilson, permit me to say that your exploits have given me a great deal of confidence. Harrumph, confidence!"

"Indeed, Dr. Murray?" Chris said politely when Vi looked quite blank.

"Ahem, confidence!" the noted savant belched for the third time. "You see, for some time I've been working on an invention which creates a fire from a distance. But up to now I have been afraid to reveal even a single detail about the formula, for fear that it might—harrumph!—get into the wrong hands. Consequently I have kept my workshop a secret."

"Indeed?" Chris repeated, a little bewildered.

"A HEM, criminals!" Dr. Murray said. "Ah—you might be interested to know that I utilize specified vibratory wavelengths and project them over an electro-magnetic beam. The atoms of whatever the vibration contacts are immediately excited. The process can be applied to steel, wood, in fact any element at all."

"However, apart from its uses for

tunneling, boring, mining and so forth, this machine is potentially very dangerous. If criminals should—"

The lights went out. Everybody stopped talking at once. Then chairs began to bang, plates to rattle—and there was a splintering of glass at one of the windows.

"Trouble ahead!" Vi breathed, standing beside Chris.

"We might have known," Chris agreed, "what with Murray's new invention—"

The words were startled out of his mouth as the lights suddenly flashed on. People began to blink and get their eyes focused. Everyone looked a bit foolish.

Then—"Somebody has been tampering with the switches!" the Science president exclaimed. "That was no accident—"

A huxom dowager, wife of one of the savants, began to shout hysterically,

"Help! Police! Dr. Murray's gone!"

Even as she screamed, Chris and the girl, who had noticed the scientist's disappearance seconds before, were at the window which had shattered. A huge gap showed.

"There!" Chris shouted, pointing. "That man on the next roof! He's carrying somebody—"

"Not if I can catch him," Vi said tersely. Jumping to the window ledge, she eased herself through the broken glass, dropped to the flat roof-top and hurried toward the parapet, Chris close at her heels.

There was a sudden interruption. "Hey, there, hold on!" came a hoarse shout. "This is a police job. You can't—"

Vi glanced back, her eyes narrowing. It was Chief of Police Welgand, and he was a study in official wrath.

"Take it easy, Chief!" she called back impishly. "You'll live longer."

At the parapet the girl halted abruptly. There was a fifteen-foot chasm between it and the adjoining roof.

"Vi, this is a police matter!" Chris panted behind her. "It's an awful long drop"—he pointed streetward to little dots that were pedestrians—"down there!"

"I hope not," the girl muttered. She smiled naively. "Chris, I've got to have some action! I'm the Golden Amazon—not a gin-bred debutante."

Swiftly she tore away the gown she was wearing, to stand revealed in the brief tunic she invariably wore.

"You'll never be a lady!" Chris groaned.

"I don't think so, either," Vi grinned. Then she leaped to the parapet, poised for a moment, and took off. The jump sent her to the opposite roof with ease—across a two-thousand foot drop.

Chris bit his lip, moved back, then made a similar effort. But it was only an effort. He sprawled half on and half off the opposite parapet and hung there desperately, until the girl grabbed him by the collar and hoisted away.

"This is a woman's job," she chuckled a little grimly.

"Well, I'm no female kangaroo!" Chris spluttered.

Dodging and twisting, the two of them went racing after the kidnaper. But whoever it was had too good a head start. The pair of them brought up abruptly when their ears rang with the roar of discharged powder and a screaming rocket ship tore upward into the starry sky, a trail of coruscating sparks in its wake.

Chris mopped his face and said something he hoped Vi didn't hear.

"Well, General Barrier at Heavyside Layer will stop 'em! Let's get to the radio, quick!"

. The girl watched the rocket sparks

wink out, a frown on her pretty face.

"Come on! If they get Murray to confess all about that invention of his, it'll be just too bad!"

SHE turned and led the way back over the roof at desperate speed. They finally descended to ground level. Ten minutes of dodging in and out side roads brought them to the grounds where the girl's own super-fast space machine, the *Ultra*, stood parked. She motioned to Chris and he flipped the parking check ticket to the waiting robot.

Vi dropped into the driving seat and Chris slammed the airlock. Expertly the girl closed the switches. In a long curving arc the *Ultra* lifted into the clear sky, rose high over the bowl of lights that was the night-twinkling city.

"Contact General Barrier," the girl said after a bit. "Make yourself useful for once."

"Hell! I almost forgot what we came for."

Chris switched on the radio telephone. He waited impatiently, then snapped,

"Hello, Grant! Chris Wilson. If a ship of normal class goes through General Barrier atop Heaviside in the next five minutes, stop it! It— What! Gone through already? Damn! Okay, Grant."

"Oh, dear," the girl said softly. "Now we'll have to go all the way after them."

Chris glared at her. "Always pulling fast ones, aren't you?"

"Now listen, Chris!" The girl faced him, her violet eyes bright and eager. "Get it through your civilized skull that because I have muscles, it doesn't say my brain's wrapped in 'em as well. I've got wits, same as you—only I'm not as sentimental."

"I know what criminals will do to get scientific secrets—and I fight them with their own weapons, strength, ingenuity, ruthless force if need be. I haven't lived twenty years in the wilds of Venus for nothing!"

She turned back to the controls, her face set. Chris patted her satiny shoulder gently.

"Sorry, Vi. Guess I was rather a heel at that."

"Glad you realize it! I'm not such a barbarian I don't feel things like that. And don't stand there doing nothing—we're at General Barrier. Flash the all-clear signal!"

He obeyed dutifully. The ship shot through the Barrier and the whole void yawned ahead, star-dusted, complete. The girl sat back a little in her chair. For a moment or two she sat pondering, then Chris gave a sudden cry and swung around.

"There they are! Look — right ahead!"

VI started. "What? Oh!" She gazed through the outlook port as Chris glanced at her in surprise.

"Say, what are they doing?" she asked abruptly. "They're firing something from the rear gun to be sure it falls free of their gravity— Why, it's a body!" she finished, horrified.

Chris turned to the telescope, adjusted it swiftly. He and the girl stared into the mirror.

"Body, all right," he assented grimly. "Without a space suit. Burst and bloated to hell. The devils must have blown air into him before putting him outside. Do you think it's—"

"It's Dr. Murray," the girl said, her keen face set and hard.

"I'm afraid you're right."

Vi stared after the ship, then began to cut the *Ultra*'s power down as the floating corpse came within reach,

frozen into a gray mummy with the incredible cold of space. The first bloating had gone now; no trace of it remained except the scars. But there was no gainsaying but what the corpse in the deeps was Dr. Grant Murray. Certain definite facial lines were unmistakable.

"Fiends!" Vi whispered, clenching her fists. "Inhuman fiends, Chris!"

She caught his arm, forced him to look into her flushed, angry face.

"Now do you understand what I meant?" she demanded. "Do you think now that I fly out into space just on any pretext? No! These criminals are without mercy. The same mind that conceived the idea of mastering a world by bacteria plague is at work again—this time with fire! Obviously they forced Murray to reveal his great invention, then dumped him out in space."

Chris glanced through the window. "Unless I'm mistaken, they are heading for Venus."

"Exactly." The girl gazed with him for a moment. "They hope to give me the slip at Venus—but they won't!" She smiled bitterly. "Once on Venus and they're at my mercy!"

CHAPTER II

Doublecrossed

THEREAFTER the girl left most of the driving to the robot control. She kept to her original plan of just keeping the fugitive machine in sight, and after each rest period surveyed it intently.

At long last the fugitive plunged into the eternal cloud banks swirling about Venus.

Fingers on the switches, Vi drove the *Ultra* down with dizzying speed through the blanketing mists, to burst suddenly upon the wild and flaming verdure of

the Hotlands spread out like a patch-work quilt of many colors. In every direction stretched the giant forests of Venus, shooting in most places from sheer mud.

"They've slipped us," Chris snapped, staring ahead.

"They're out of sight, sure," the girl admitted. "But that doesn't hide them from me, Chris. I have friends here."

Chris held his breath as with unerring accuracy the girl sent the ship twisting and diving, swept through a clear spot between the trees and down into a clearing. The ship landed with a thud.

Vi sprang to her feet, slipped a ray gun into her belt and flipped one to Chris. Then she opened the airlock to Venus' sickly, enervating warmth.

"Come on," she said briefly.

"But—where?" Chris stared outside. "Sheer mud out there. We'll sink—and the ship, too, before long."

She smiled. "I know this planet as well as you know your Earth—a darned sight better, perhaps. You'll have to trust my judgment from now on."

"All right—I'll be the fall guy once again. Let's go!" Chris flung himself outside irritably, and instantly went to his knees in mud.

"Hey!" he yelled in alarm. "Hey, gimme a hand!"

It did not improve his temper when the girl started laughing at him. He watched her balefully as she jumped out beside him—but onto solid ground, to his surprise. Her supple arms hooked beneath his own and hauled him free. Muttering to himself, he shook the clinging mud from his gum boots.

"Wise guy!" the girl said laconically. "Serves you right for going off in a temper! This is a checkerboard clearing—half false ground and half normal. You can tell the solid parts by the lighter color. That is why the ship does

not sink! Now—watch me and follow."

She set the example by making lithe leaps from pale square to pale square. Chris studied her technique for a moment, then followed her, and so into dense virgin jungle. They went on for awhile through a hopeless tangle of magenta vines, stirring up a myriad life forms that squawked and chattered wildly at their approach. Heat, crushing and relentless, beat down like a branding iron.

"Are you *sure* all this is right?" Chris groaned at length, wiping the pouring perspiration from his face. "They wouldn't come anywhere near here, surely? They've probably gone off into space again by now."

"No. They'd have to stop about an hour to let the rockets cool off a hit. Wherever they have gone, there is one certain way of finding them: the Hotlanders will tell me everything. They're always roaming about the forest."

"Hotlanders?" Chris ruminated. "Oh, the things that brought you up!"

HE stopped and winced as the girl let forth a piercing, strident whistle. It went reverberating through the fastness. After a hit there came an answering whistle.

Vi nodded complacently. "They'll come. I told you I had friends here. Sit down—you look all in." She eyed his sweating face with a faint hint of contempt.

"I'll stand," he snapped. "Because your skin remains cool as an icebox, that's no reason to make a fool out of me!"

Vi shrugged and leaned idly against a tree. Then after perhaps five minutes, Chris started at the vision of a most incredible being coming into the clearing. It reminded him of a giant pelican, half fish and half animal, with

protruding eyes set in horny sockets. Its feet were webbed, its arms powerful flippers. Yet despite its extraordinary size—for it was possibly eight feet tall—it looked docile.

The girl, her slender form dwarfed by the giant, raced forward eagerly. Instantly a flipper curved round her waist and lifted her up lightly. Chris stood watching uneasily, noting for the first time the appalling claws the thing possessed. A rip from those claws could tear a human being in two.

"Hey, Vi, is this wise?" he demanded, cocking his ray gun.

"Wise? When they brought me up?" She gave an amused laugh, then turned and, pressing her face close to the thing's bullet head, started talking in a high-pitched jabber that finally brought forth from the thing a voluble answer in the same key. Finally the girl nodded and was gently lowered to the ground again.

"The ship landed in Ray's Clearing," she said quickly, coming up. "I rather figured that. That's where the space ship fell twenty years ago after the mutiny that killed Mother and Dad, and incidentally landed me on this planet."

She shrugged. "Well, come on. Delikus and others of the tribe saw our quarry head direct to Ray's Clearing."

"Damned considerate of our fugitive friends," Chris murmured. "Showing which way they went, I mean. Incidentally, why did that creature have to cradle you in its flippers for you to speak to him?"

"Matter of hearing. They've no ears—only hear by vibration at close quarters. A whistle on a certain note is the only thing they hear over a distance."

"Beats me how you turned out into an attractive girl, what with slugs as your educators and all," Chris sniffed.

"Even a slug can have kindness and unselfish devotion," she said seriously.

Then as they came to another clearing,

"We can get to Ray's Clearing through what I call Vine Alley. If you're good at swinging you'll be okay. Follow me."

In another moment he saw what she meant. After a tour through dense underbrush they had ahead of them a long vista of ropy, dangling shapes stretching as far as Chris could see.

"Catch one and swing to the next," Vi said briefly. "If you miss you'll land in the swamp. So don't miss," she added significantly. "Or maybe you'd prefer a safer but longer route."

"Oh, yeah? Quit ribbing me, can't you? Let's go!"

SHE nodded and leapt upward and outward. Her steel muscles and fascinating grace were attributes which Chris could only marvel at every time he beheld them. With the ease of an aerial artist she swung from vine to vine, never once missing, to make unerring progress across the swamp waste bubbling turbidly below.

By exerting all his strength Chris finally managed to get across. He landed with aching arms, to find the girl languidly waiting, not even flushed from her efforts.

"Nice work," she commented dryly. "Now we take it easy. Ray's Clearing is just over the ridge."

Vi threw herself down flat and wriggled forward. Chris did likewise, and in a moment they poked their heads carefully amidst waving ferngrass and stared below on a verdure-encircled clearing. There in the middle of it was the fugitive space ship, its airlock open. Near it, squatting on upturned boxes in a circle around a radio receiver, were six men.

"Easy," the girl breathed, her eyes bright. "Only six of them. Have your gun ready."

She stood up, straight as a goddess for a moment, muscles rippling as she flexed her arms. Then she sprang!

The leap carried her outward into the clearing and she landed squarely on the back of the nearest man. Her yellow arm hooked under his bristly chin and yanked him backward. He gasped and choked under the sudden strangling grip.

Instantly the other men were on their feet, but their hands stopped halfway to their guns as the girl's free hand leveled her own weapon, while with the other she held the struggling, kicking thug over her head.

"Take it easy!" she snapped. "Drop your guns, the lot of you! One false move and I'll crack this guy's neck! Chris, take their arms."

He nodded and started to move forward, but at the same moment the man imprisoned in the girl's arm squirmed suddenly loose, hit on the balls of his feet, whirled around and slammed out his fist. The girl dodged like lightning, and the full force of her piledriver fist jolted the man right off his pins. Right on top of it her knuckles crashed into his jaw, dropped him like a sack of flour into the dust.

But the diversion had been enough. Even as Vi swung back a gun prodded into her spine.

"Okay, Amazon, drop your gun! Drop it! Get your arms up!"

Quietly she obeyed, face flaming with fury. She turned to find Chris similarly covered. He cast her a quick, hopeless glance.

"I'm Morgan." The man with the gun introduced himself, grinning. "And I'm boss of this little outfit, see? Guess you think you're smart, eh, Amazon? Just because you found a dead body in space, you fell for the gag, just as we figured. We even took good care to leave a trail that would lead you to us

bere. You're not the only one who knows Venus, baby!"

The girl stared. "You—you mean it was a decoy?"

"Nothing else but." The man's brutish face was still grinning. "Dr. Murray is still in New York—practicing medicine! And you're on Venus because you had to fall for a gag. Just too bad, isn't it? Sixty million miles too far out! Tsk, tsk!"

"That was Murray you threw out of your ship!" Chris shouted. "We'd know him anywhere."

"Yeah?" Morgan's eyebrows rose, then he shrugged. "That's what you think." He motioned sharply. "All right, boys, tie 'em up—and use chains for the Amazon. Rope won't hold her."

VI stood impassive, her face set, as her wrists were manacled behind her with a length of steel chain. Chris made sundry efforts to break free, without success. The pair of them ended up on their backs near the space ship. Manacles and chains to their ankles held them tightly trussed up.

"Just what do you figure you're going to get out of this, Morgan?" the girl asked bitterly, gazing up at him.

"I dunno. I'm just obeying orders. The Chief will tell us by radio what to do—that's what it's switched on for."

He turned away and resumed his seat on the upturned crate near the receiver. At the moment it was chattering various items of news from the cosmos, reports from distant police headquarters in the void.

Chris began to strain gently at his ropes.

"If I could only get free of these cords, I'd beat the living daylights out of these rats!" he breathed.

"With no weapons on us and all the advantage with the enemy?"

The girl struggled to a sitting posi-

tion and shook her black head.

"I know when I'm licked, even if you don't. Besides, I want to think. It was Murray we found in the void: I could swear to it. Yet Morgan here says he's still on Earth. Does he mean by that, I wonder, that *Murray* is the master mind we've been looking for all this time?"

"The whole thing was obviously an idea to get you and me out of the way," Chris growled. He was silent for a moment. "The hell with it! Right now, I want to figure a way out of this mess."

"It may not be so difficult at that," the girl said quietly.

She threw back her head and gave a piercing whistle. It went echoing through the forest.

"Hotlanders!" Chris breathed. "Of course!"

"Hey, there, cut it out!" Morgan jumped to his feet and came running up. "Hear me?"

The girl nodded slowly—and then whistled all the harder, until she was suddenly cut short by the stinging slap of Morgan's palm across her face. Her lips twitched, her eyes blazed with anger.

"All right, Morgan, you asked for it," she said very quietly.

He swung aside contemptuously, shouting to his uneasy men.

"Get set, boys! The Amazon's given some sort of signal and we don't know what's coming. Blast the first thing that appears in this clearing!"

CHAPTER III

The Mighty Fallen

THREE was something rather comical in the way the men gathered in a group and stood glancing about with guns ready. Vi glanced at Chris and smiled twistedly. Things were about to

happen.

Suddenly there was a cracking and snapping of branches from the undergrowth, and two Hotlanders appeared with claws bared in readiness. Immediately the girl shouted directions in the queer, chattering language of Venus; then she paused and lay watching anxiously.

"No chance of them hearing me, I'm afraid," Vi said worriedly. "Only hope is they'll realize I'm in danger and do something about it."

"That," Chris breathed, watching intently, "is just what they *are* doing!"

No sooner had he spoken than ray guns started blazing. Smoking holes were blasted in the earth, the Hotlanders themselves were hit and dropped with sickening impact. But still they came on, from different directions now, bellowing and roaring their fury.

One of the men twisted around, dashed for the space ship and started up the rocket exhausts with the obvious idea of a dash for safety into the upper air. But he was too hasty, failed to allow for the gravitational backdrag. All he accomplished was a blinding shower of sparks that half lifted the machine and then nose-dived it into the trees. But the sparks left their disaster behind them. The tinder-dry foliage began to smoke ominously, burst abruptly into flame.

Morgan came blundering through the fire, hawling at the top of his voice.

"Hey, you idiot! You've set the clearing afire! Get the hell out of that ship!"

He dived forward, dodged the down-sweep of terrible claws and aimed his gun viciously. The Hotlander crumpled with its entire middle blasted away.

Hotlanders, scurrying men, dust and smoke were all a chaos now. In the midst of the confusion, above the crackle of fast-gathering flame, the radio

set the gangsters had been clustered about burst rather incongruously into strident life.

"Calling Venusian Unit Five. Morgan! Calling Morgan! Here are your orders. If you have captured Violet Ray and Chris Wilson, return with them at once to Earth. If not, *find* them! Remember, the Amazon must be alive for you to claim your full bonus. You—"

The message wheezed off as a Hotlander trod on the receiver and smashed it to atoms.

"Private waveband, obviously," the girl snapped, wriggling away from the approaching fire. "Pretty clear now it was all a trick to get us cornered. Not that we're clear yet, with these fools' chains around us."

"Hey, you guys, did you hear that?" Morgan roared, appearing momentarily through the cloud of smoke and searching for his motley crew. "We've got to—" He vanished again as a Hotlander dived for him.

Here and there other men emerged through the smoke. It was evident from their isolated shouts that they had all heard the message, but events were too hectic for them to take any concerted action. The plunging Hotlanders and sweeping flames were ruthless enemies. And besides, their ship was becoming ringed in a blazing circle.

"We've got to get out of here!" Morgan's voice hollered. "Get out—into the jungle. Find a mud stretch. Get moving!"

"But the Amazon! There's a bonus for her!"

"What do you want, a bonus or a coffin? Beat it! We'll get the ship from the ashes later."

THE voices ceased, and the thunder of the Venusian heasts merged with the crackling of branches and under-

growth.

"They've gone," Chris panted, coughing. "And your precious Hotlanders after them. They've left us to fry!" he finished hoarsely, staring at the girl's grim face, then at the roaring flames. "We've got to get out of this!"

He set about tearing frantically at his bonds.

"Get back to back," he panted. "See if you can shift these ropes."

"Can't. My hands are too tightly chained."

Chris gave a groan of despair as a tongue of flame licked toward them and a nearby tree went up like a giant torch. Heat rose to dizzying proportions, sent sweat rolling down Chris's face and arms. His wrists became slippery as he pulled and tugged. In a sense the fact helped him. Little by little, shifting his flesh along the rope, he began to draw his right hand clear. It came suddenly free, and his left hand was a simple matter.

Working with desperate speed he rolled to the nearest heavy stone and set about breaking the chain, thumped and banged until the links snapped. Instantly he jumped up, raced for the girl, and swept her still-chained form into his arms.

"Hang on—I'll get you out of this!"

Vi lay passive, and it struck him for a moment that she seemed to be smiling, though what at he could not imagine. At top speed Chris bore her across the clearing, pulled up short before a roaring wall of flame. He backed out and tried another point—with the same result. Hopelessly he set the girl on her feet, supported her to prevent her from overbalancing.

"Vi, we can't get out!" he shouted desperately, staring at the crackling ring. "We're stuck—hemmed in!"

The girl's eyes traveled round the encirclement. Finally she gave a sigh.

"Well, this is it," Vi said shortly, and with that Chris saw her slender bare arms suddenly become taut. She set her teeth, strained until the veins began to show on her slender neck, until her shoulders were hunched with supreme effort.

Then suddenly there was a *click!* and Vi brought her hands around, her bleeding wrists clamped with manacles and dangling ends of broken chain. As Chris stood gaping, she sat down with a hump and caught her superhuman fingers in the links of the ankle chain. She twisted, turned, twisted again with relentless power. The strained link snapped abruptly and she got to her feet.

"Let's go!" The girl caught Chris's arm. "I'll smash off these wrists and ankle cuffs later."

"Why the devil didn't you escape before?" Chris demanded, racing beside her.

"Dunno. Must have been the fear of death that gave me enough strength."

Chris knew that was not the truth. He scowled thoughtfully as he ran. Then he pulled up short at another point in the flaming barrier. The girl studied it, shielding her face from the barrage of heat.

"Can you sink your manly dignity far enough to rely on me to get you out of here?" she asked briefly.

"Sooner do that than fry, naturally."

"That's being sensible. Now, put your arms around my neck—not to kiss me, you dope!" she added, as he faced her. "Hang yourself down my back—Good!"

CHRIS obeyed, clinging to the girl's supple form desperately as she leapt upward with terrific agility. He felt blinding heat waves about him as Vi levered herself into the branches of the nearest unburned tree. Seizing a

vine, she went swinging out across a dizzy abyss of smoke and flame, landed in more branches with a crash—then she dropped so suddenly that Chris thought they had fallen.

But they hadn't. They plunged into a mud stretch and Chris fell free.

"Thought I was right," the girl said. "This mud stretch runs due north of Ray's Clearing. A mile wide, so fire can't reach us. We've only to head straight along it to overtake Morgan and his precious crew."

"But suppose we sink?"

"I've done this trip dozens of times. We'll sink no lower than our shoulders—less for you because you're taller than me. Come on—the Hotlanders' trail is everywhere around us," she added. "Morgan and company went this way for sure. They'll probably try to work around in a circle to regain their ship."

Chris moved through the sludgelike mass to the girl's side.

"How'd you know they went this way? Wish you'd recall that I'm a city man, not a wild product of the jungle," he finished slyly.

"That, Chris, sounds like a dirty crack." Vi nodded her head to the distant bank. "See those nearer trees, with their herringbone branches? They're carnivorous. I call them Indicator trees. Anything on a large scale of life—like a human being, or better still, a Hotlander—attracts them.

"They swing to it as a compass needle swings north, as an Earth tree bends to the prevailing wind. Those trees remain thus for twenty minutes after life has passed near to them. Then they straighten slowly. Natural plant reflex actions."

"Nice place," Chris sighed. "I can think of much better ways for my wife to live."

"Bridge, barrooms and boredom!" Vi snapped. "No dice!"

She went on again vigorously, the flowing mud up to her armpits. For half a mile or so the pair of them followed the mud river down-stream, leaving the smoky burning area somewhere behind them. Then the girl paused suddenly and surveyed the Indicator trees.

"Here!" she ordered cryptically, and finally climbed out onto a bank filmed in yellow mud. "Somewhere near here," she went on as Chris came floundering to her side. "See! A rough trail has been made. We can overtake them quicker through the trees."

She started shinning up the bole of the nearest giant, leaned down and dragged Chris up after her. Thereafter his slower progress held them up somewhat, but Chris stubbornly refused the aid of the girl's whipcord arm. As they went on she said,

"*Ultra*'s not far from here, either—about a mile to the north. If we go carefully, we might be able to rope all our friends in and get them to the ship—turn them over to the earth authorities—"

"Without our guns?" Chris demanded.

"They've got guns—we can grab them. Of course, catching them won't stop the entire crime ring, but it'll be a help—And hurry up!"

ANOTHER half mile through the trees and the girl gave a quick signal. Chris' eyes gleamed as he stared through the foliage. Moving slowly in and out of the jungle, obviously lost, were Morgan and three others. What had happened to the rest of the party could probably have been told best by the Hotlanders.

"Either capture or kill them," Vi stated briefly. "Understand?"

"Yeah. But I want to sock Morgan. He hit you in the face—"

"So I'll pay him back myself! You get the others—and watch out for their guns. Our best weapon is surprise. Let's go!"

They leapt together, the girl traveling with projectile swiftness to crash clean on the back of the astounded Morgan. He tugged out his gun, but the girl's fist knocked him off his feet before he had the opportunity. He scrambled up, then went flying backward with a bloody nose from the girl's sizzling punch.

"Some fun, hub?" she snapped. "Now we're really going to play!"

Chris, further along the trail, brought his right fist around with potent effect, sent one of the men spinning into the waiting folds of an Indicator tree—albeit unintentionally. Chris stared, then turned away sickened as ropy constrictor branches cracked bone and sinew in a merciless crunch.

Abruptly a fist struck him on the jaw. Chris staggered, lashed back, delivered an uppercut that surprised him and knocked his antagonist sprawling. Snarling the man pulled out his gun. Instantly Chris dived and, deflecting the lethal beam at the last moment, fell on top of the man—only to find the weapon had seared half his head, away.

He got up, nauseated, snatched for the gun—and missed it, as the third of the gang plunged into the attack. As Chris fought he caught glimpses of the girl out of the corner of his eye. He saw Vi dive in a tackle, lift Morgan off his feet and whirl him over her head. With all her strength she prepared to hurl the man into a monstrous stretch of death-stinging nettles. But at the last moment the broken manacle on her right ankle caught in a piece of undergrowth. She toppled, overbalanced with Morgan on top of her.

"Vi!" Chris screamed in alarm.

Then the fist of Chris' own assailant sent him spinning, his mouth salty with blood. Through a haze he saw the girl leap to her feet and lash out with her fist, but before it impacted Morgan's hard knuckles struck her with terrific force on the jaw and knocked her flying. She started to rise again, and Morgan's gun flamed. The girl relaxed weakly, blood suddenly welling from the thin burned slash across her bare left shoulder.

Something inside Chris snapped at that. For the first time in his life he saw the Amazon powerless, lying gasping on the ground at Morgan's mercy. No longer a super-being but a suffering woman—

Chris swung round like lightning, charged at his remaining opponent and delivered a blow to the jaw that numbed his hand. Drunk with the onslaught, the man reeled helplessly, but he did not fall. For Chris caught him around the waist, drove him forward, delivered another blow, and another, that finally swung the man blindly into the bed of death nettles. Morgan fired twice, erratically. It was not possible for him to blast Chris without striking his own man.

NOT that it mattered now. The man gave one frightful scream as the nettles closed over him, then his body sank out of sight in the fatal bush—

"One more move, Chris Wilson, and I'll drop you!" Morgan screamed shrilly. "Come here!"

Panting, drenched with perspiration, Chris slowly obeyed. He ignored Morgan and bent down beside the girl. She raised a pained face.

"Looks—looks like I messed things up," she breathed, relaxing again.

"Get up, Wilson!" Morgan roared. "Damn you, get to your feet!"

"Right!" Chris snapped, and literal-

ly shot up, fist included. The gun blazed, missed as Morgan's jaw cracked under the impact of Chris's hard knuckles. Morgan sat down, half stunned, bewildered, and found himself looking into the level barrel of his own gun.

"Now you get up!" Chris shouted. "On your feet!"

His brutish face scowling, Morgan obeyed. Still keeping him covered, Chris bent beside the girl, tore off what remained of his shirt and bound it hastily with one hand over the freely bleeding wound.

"If I'd given her the full width of my gun nozzle, I'd have blown her head off," Morgan heated. "I didn't want to really injure her—." He was afraid to move at the light in Chris's eyes.

"Can that stuff!" Chris snapped. "You're only thinking of the bonus you can get—maybe! But you'll take my orders from now on. The space ship's around here some place. Start marching!"

"Northward," the girl whispered weakly.

"Hang onto me, Vi," Chris murmured, scooping her up into his arms. "I'll see you're all right. I'm not so weak as you think—Go on, you!" he roared, still keeping his gun trained on Morgan.

Morgan started walking, following the path the girl directed from time to time. Lying limply in Chris' arms, she glanced up now and again into her young husband's grim, perspiring face.

"Guess I'm only a woman after all," she murmured a little bitterly.

"You're just made of flesh and blood like everyone else," Chris soothed her. "Don't worry, I've got everything under control. I'll soon patch up your shoulder when we reach the *Ultra*."

Vi smiled faintly and seemed to become heavier in his arms. He glanced

down at the red-soaked handage and hurried his pace. Ever and again he roused the girl out of apparent stupor for fresh directions, until at last he stumbled into the open space he longed to see. The *Ultra* was still there on the mudflats.

"Go on!" Chris ordered, jabbing Morgan's back with the gun.

"But it's mud—"

"Jump from pale patch to pale patch. I know this planet backward! I'm only keeping you alive until I see what happens to Vi. If she gets any worse, I'm going to take you to pieces, hit by hit—and it'll hurt! Otherwise you get Earth trial. Now move!"

In five minutes they were at the airlock. Chris lowered the half-fainting girl to the wall bed, then hacked to the airlock and screwed it up. Still keeping Morgan covered, he started up the rocket engines, drove the ship swiftly into the upper atmosphere. Then he put his ray gun in the arms closet and locked it securely.

"Okay, Morgan. I'll take care of you later."

MORGAN said nothing. He turned to the port and gazed outside. Then he turned back, to watch Chris busy with a bowl of water and first-aid kit. Chris stared at the girl's weary face anxiously when he had at last stopped the flow of blood and treated the wound with tissue-knitting ointment. Her eyes brightened a little after a restorative.

"Better?" he asked earnestly, clasping her hand.

"Much," she said quietly. Then her gaze looked beyond him.

"But you've still a lot to learn, Chris. Never turn your back on an enemy!"

"Huh?" Chris whirled around—and found himself staring into a leveled old-type revolver in Morgan's hand.

"Not so smart, eh, Wilson?" the gangster grinned. "I carry a ray gun and a service revolver—just in case."

Chris darted a glance at the girl. "Vi, you *must* have seen him pull this rod out! Why didn't you warn me!"

"Because she's got more sense than you have!" Morgan snapped. "If you'd have turned suddenly, I'd have drilled you. . . . Guess I've got the pair of you cornered," he went on, surveying the helpless girl.

"As for you, Chris Wilson—" Morgan suddenly choked with rage. "Damn you, get to that control board!"

"If you touch Vi—" Chris blazed.

"Get to that board!"

Flushing angrily, Chris reluctantly did so.

"Now set the course to Earth," Morgan snapped. "Maybe it was your intention, anyway—only you'll drive where *I* say when we hit Earth. I've plenty to collect for the Amazon and you!"

Chris busied himself with the switches, then he said:

"You know, then, who the master mind is behind all this crime and intrigue?"

"Sure I do." Morgan grinned sourly. "But I'm not telling you anything. You'll find out for yourselves in time, but it won't do you any good."

Morgan leered cynically at them and then switched on the space radio.

"May as well see how the Chief is progressing."

Fifteen minutes passed before a news bulletin was broadcast. The tape-recorded synthetic voice spoke with its usual dispassionate calm.

"The arson outbreak continues, on a larger scale than ever. Coming on the heels of five factory blazes which no fire brigade can extinguish, are reports of conflagrations in several Government-controlled works. Much of the

mystery seems to be connected with Dr. Murray, formerly thought to be kidnaped but now known to be still in New York, though without his famous fire-creating formula. As yet the police have no effective leads.

"Some sources report amazing ultimata to the Government which savor of twentieth century gangsterism. It is thought that the demands include the turning over of vital national rights to other hands. If these demands are not complied with, a vast scale of fires is probable. Clearly, the same criminal ring that tried to master America by means of bacteria is—"

Morgan switched off suddenly.

"The Chief is going places," he murmured.

"But Dr. Murray died!" Chris shouted. "We saw him! Now they say he's on Earth—"

Morgan smiled contemptuously and sat down with his gun across his knees.

CHAPTER IV

The Master Mind

CHRIS got up suddenly from the control board and sat down beside the silent girl.

"Vi, do you realize what all this means?" he demanded. "We are the only ones who can do anything to halt this scheme—and we're caught!"

"Beef all you like," Morgan chuckled harshly. He got up, thrust his gun in his belt. "But just don't start anything. I'm going to fix myself a meal."

Chris watched him moving clumsily about in the storage cupboard, then he turned back to the girl and spoke in low tones.

"Vi, now you're laid up, what's the next move? Tell me! I'll carry on the fight until—"

The girl eased herself up a little,

wincing and fell back.

"You're right—I am laid out," she breathed. "And—and there's something else, too—wrong with me, I mean. There's a weakness about me that I don't like."

Chris gestured reassuringly. "Nothing—loss of blood, that's all. Capsules concentrated at triple strength will put you right."

"If I were a normal woman, yes. But—"

"Hey, there, you two, quit talking!" Morgan ordered.

He pulled up the portable table and laid his gun beside his plate.

"Eat!" he snapped. He jerked the girl up unceremoniously to a sitting position. Vi sat white-faced, holding her bandaged shoulder and taking the capsules Chris doled out to her.

"And get this," Morgan added, when the silent meal was finished, "I'm taking restorative pills to keep me awake throughout this entire trip. So don't try anything funny."

With that the gangster took up a watchful position, with his chair on its hind legs against the wall. Gun on his knees, he sat watching, grim and uncommunicative. Chris returned slowly to the control board, bitter, frowning. He was not afraid of risking the gun; but he was afraid of jeopardizing Vi's life. Therein lay the reason for his inaction.

* * *

MORGAN kept his word. As the flying chronometer days and nights sped by; as the ship tore through infinity to ever-swelling Earth; as the radio chattered at intervals of fire disasters, the gangster maintained his unremitting surveillance in the *Ultra*.

Vi was about again, but curiously quiet. For a reason Chris could not fathom, she had lost her usual cynical daring and crisp activity. She seemed

morose, languid, despite the fact that soothing unguents had long since healed her shoulder.

It was when the ship came within visible distance of the General Barrier at Heavyside that Chris could stand it no longer. He turned from gazing through the port, and with the eyes of Morgan upon him went over to the girl's side.

"Vi, what is it?" He caught her slender hands. "You're well again, aren't you?"

"Not altogether." She paused, searched his face keenly with her violet eyes. "You know what gives me my strength, don't you?"

"Why, sure. Venus produced a steady anabolism in your physique—building up your cells, whereas normally they would break down. So?"

VI said quietly, "A skin surface wound causes a tremendous breakdown in the cellular strength I've built up all my life. It happened once before when I was injured. Maybe months will pass before I get even a semblance of my old strength back again."

Chris stared at her, baffled. "But, Vi, I don't get it. How could this happen?"

"Sampson shorn of his hair," she sighed. "I have about the strength of a normal woman, and until I can soak myself in Venus' unique climate again, it'll be a long time before I'm fully myself once more."

"However"—she flashed a glance at the distantly watching Morgan—"I'll take one more chance. Maybe I'm strong enough to swing it. If I can distract Morgan's attention and get some real sting into my punch, you can get his gun."

"Right! Wondered when you were going to suggest something. I'll watch

your every move."

Vi got to her feet presently and strolled casually to the port, to look out on the fast-approaching Heavside General Barrier with the swirling police machines. Then suddenly she swung round, charged straight for the waiting Morgan with her fist clenched. Up came his arm straight away, and his gun followed it. But he had no need to use it.

His blow sent the girl tottering hock-
ward helplessly. She fell on the switch-
board, clutched the levers to save herself. Slowly she stood up, quivering.

"I was right, unfortunately," she whispered, as Chris stared in dismay. "I've lost my strength. I'm like any other woman—anywhere."

"Huh?" Morgan ejaculated, mouth gaping.

"It's your fault!" she blazed. "But for your wounding me, this would never have happened! I'm no longer the Amazon! Don't you understand?"

"Yeah—Sure I do!" Morgan grinned complacently. He reached forward, gave the girl a shove and watched her spin helplessly onto the wall bed.

"Feeble as a kitten," he chuckled. "Well, that's swell—but since I recall your brain always hits on every cylinder, I'll keep you covered just the same."

Morgan swung around. "Wilson, take this ship north of the city. I'll direct you."

Chris moved with a hopeless gesture to obey. Morgan turned again and whirled the girl to her feet.

"Put on overalls over that costume!" he snapped. "You'll do the same afterward, Wilson. Don't want either of you recognized when we land."

Chris moved the rocket controls, sent the ship whirling over the twilight mass of the city. Presently the lights came up below and he plunged downward,

still following directions. At last he landed on an open stretch of ground at the spaceport.

"Okay, Wilson. Now those overalls."

Morgan waited impatiently, finally surveyed the pair, then jerked open the airlock.

"Outside!" He put his gun in his pocket and retained his grip on it. "And take care what you say and do. If there has to be any talking, leave it to me."

THEY went across the busy space-
port without molestation, took a
check from the robot inspector. Morgan stopped and hailed the first express
taxi, gave brief directions. Ten minutes of whirling through streets and
across intersections brought them to a ponderous, isolated residence of the
pre-Change era on the outskirts of the city.

"Move!" Morgan ordered, and followed the two up a long, dark driveway lined with trees.

"Say, isn't this Dr. Murray's home?" Chris asked the girl in a low voice.

"Yes. But—"

"Shut up, you two! I said I'd do all the talking!"

As they approached the massive front door, they caught a glimpse of a heavy closed truck pushed into the concealment of shrubbery. Then the door opened at Morgan's insistent ringing.

They walked through a cavern of a hall, up a flight of stairs, and came then into a glare of lights in one of the front rooms. The place was fitted up as a library, the curtains drawn tightly across the windows. One or two men were present, and one in particular stood by the fireplace. There was no mistaking that ponderous form—it was Dr. Grant Murray!

"Murray!" Chris exclaimed, blinking in the light. "Vi, it is Dr. Murray!"

That body in space—”

Murray broke in coldly. “You’ve done well, Morgan. If ever a man earned a reward, you have. Chris Wilson and the Amazon!”

“Thanks, Chief.”

“Then you’re the Chief!” Chris breathed. “But how— You can’t be! You’re Dr. Murray!”

“No, he isn’t, Chris,” the girl said quietly. “I suspected the truth when it was too late to do anything about it. It was the real Dr. Murray that was thrown from the space ship, wasn’t it?”

“How’d you guess it?” Murray smiled cynically. “Your brain is still very keen, I see. I am not Murray, of course, but I *am* the man who was at the banquet. I simply left the room, and a decoy led you and Wilson here to Venus, took you right out of my way.

“Then I turned up again as Murray in a dazed condition and threw the police off the scent while I got busy. They’ve questioned me, believe my secret was stolen, even suspect that *you* might have something to do with it after fleeing to Venus. . . .

“My make-up? Synthesis. Ob, yes, while nobody has bothered me here, I have been very busy. A double move, remarkably astute. Naturally, fires are controlled from my mobile truck outside, and radio messages are sent from there, too, to defeat government detectors. Need I add the real Murray fell into my hands long enough ago and now lies in the void. . . . Too bad!” he added hypocritically but soft-voiced.

“And now,” the Chief added, as the two remained silent, “I shall have to be melodramatic, I’m afraid. Since I have had you captured—which was my firm intention—I shall now destroy you. From a distance,” he finished, smiling. “Murray’s fire creator is remarkably efficient. Fasten them both up, boys!”

“Nothing to fear from the Amazon,

Chief,” Morgan grinned. “She got wounded and finished up behind the eight-ball. She’s gentle as a lamb now.”

Murray leaned toward her in the chair as she was firmly lashed to it.

“So the lioness has had her fangs drawn, eh? Such a pity! Not that it matters, since you and Wilson will shortly cease to exist anyway. No trace, no evidence—even Murray himself presumably destroyed.” He straightened up suddenly. “Let’s go, boys.”

The girl, wincing at the tightness of the cords, said slowly,

“Some day, maybe, I’ll find out who you really are! Last time I failed to even see you; this time I see you as somebody else. But *some* day—”

“I’m afraid,” the Chief sighed, “you are blessed with vast optimism.” He swung to the door, paused a moment. “The fires are short, swift, and incredibly devastating. Perhaps you will not suffer too much—”

The door slammed and locked as the last man trooped out.

IMMEDIATELY CHRIS started working on his bonds desperately.

“Got to get free somehow,” he panted, straining with all his power. “It’s all up to me now. That dirty swine! All set and waiting for us. Give my right eye to know who he really is. Something familiar about him—”

Chris broke off in sudden surprise. On the night air had come the distant wailing of a police siren which grew increasingly louder.

“Police!” he gasped, starting at the bound girl. “How the heck did they know?”

“Simple enough,” Vi replied quietly. “Remember when I fell on the switches after Morgan bit me? I pulled out the signal lever without his noticing it—no other way to do it. We went right through General Barrier with the red

triple-cross blazing. Naturally that means 'Danger: please follow.'

"As I expected, the Barrier police recognized the *Ultra*—and they followed us after getting reinforcements. Only thing is, we've got to stop Murray, Morgan and the rest of 'em from getting away in that truck before the police come."

"But these ropes are as tight as hell!"

"Maybe—" The girl suddenly heeled her chair over backward, rolled over onto her side, then began to straighten her body with every ounce of her power. The knots began to slide and slip! The strands across her breast parted one by one. Her arms moved slowly outward, until with a sudden snapping and cracking she was free, her feet kicking loose the remaining cord.

Immediately she was at Chris's side, working with nails and flawless white teeth, twisting the ropes in and out of her fingers, until his bonds were ripped free. He stood up thankfully, caught the girl in his arms.

"Vi, you've recovered! You're strong again!"

"I was never anything else," she answered briefly. "Sorry, Chris, but I couldn't help it. There was no other way of getting Morgan to bring us right to his Chief's headquarters. He might not have taken the full chance if he'd thought I was as strong as usual."

Now the sirens were whining at full blast outside. They died away as the cars screeched to a stop. Vi raced to the door and tore at it. All she did was tear the knob right off its socket. She swung to the window, ripped aside the curtains and flung the sashes wide.

Chris beside her, she stared outside. Below there was a whirl of men in the shrubbery lit by the cars' floodlights.

"Morgan! There!" Chris said

abruptly, pointing. "You take him. I'll try to find Murray."

Vi nodded, leapt to the ledge, then dropped the thirty feet straight as a plummet. Morgan, beleaguered by zipping bullets and ray-gun beams, was crouching behind the mobile truck when the girl landed. He whirled in alarm.

"Amazon! I—I thought you—"

"That I was a weak kid, eh?" She smiled knowingly. "Too bad for you. I'm still strong—and I remember that wound you gave me."

VI sprang like a tiger as Morgan whirled his gun around. The weapon went flying away. Then the girl had Morgan's wrist and ankle in an iron grip and was whirling him over her head. He crashed into the truck and fell weakly, only to be dragged up again.

A fist like concrete smashed into the gangster's jaw, made it blaze with pain. Again he was picked up and flung at the truck. He collapsed with his head whirling in darkness.

The girl twisted around then, gazed at the fighting men. Then Chris's voice reached her from the uproar.

"Murray! There he goes!"

Vi whirled around and was just in time to see the man tearing away into the shrubbery. Immediately she plunged after him, vaulting bushes as she went. The girl overtook him with ease, dragged him down as he was about to climb the surrounding railings.

One punch in the stomach doubled the Chief up. A left hook jerked his head back like a punching bag. He dropped prone to the loamy soil, with the girl standing over him. Satisfied, she dropped beside him and pulled at the cohesive synthetic flesh on his face. It came off with a yanking rip that brought him half back to consciousness.

Vi stared in amazement at the features thus revealed. Around her Chris and a batch of police gathered.

"It's Welgand, chief of police!" Chris exploded.

The girl's face set grimly. She yanked the dazed, disheveled Welgand to his feet. His thin, hard face, in contrast to the padding which made his body paunchy, was incongruous.

"What the hell—" began the police squad sergeant, staring.

"No wonder crime's flourished so well and been so prosperous when Welgand was the master mind," the girl said slowly. "Quite a lot is becoming clear now. The reason why the supposed Murray—otherwise Welgand—wasn't questioned too closely, for instance. Also, the reason why the police were always anticipated in their raids. Nice going!"

Vi shook Welgand angrily. "Wake up!" she snapped. "Spill it!"

Welgand shrugged, fingering his jaw.

"All right, so what? Influence made me chief of police, and I used the influence to my own ends. At the banquet I had only to leave, get rid of my face makeup, remove clothing and padding, and then come in again in my official capacity. I purposely tried to stop you from going to Venus when we both saw the escaping figure on the rooftops, because I knew if I did that, your obstinacy would make you go. Human nature," he added sourly.

"As to the rest, it all adds up. When I was controlling my own organization, I was simply away on business important to the police staff. Nobody questions the chief of police. Just the same, Amazon, you're not going to win *this* round—"

He broke off and popped something in his mouth suddenly.

"Poison!" Chris shouted.

Welgand nodded, then with a low

moan he dropped to the ground. Vi felt his heart.

"Still beating, anyway. Better get him to a hospital. How about the other men?"

"All roped in, and the invention's in the truck, anyway. Morgan's still out cold. Jaw smashed in two places."

"Wow!" Chris breathed, as the girl rubbed her knuckles pensively. Then she moved with the party to the police car and watched it back up. Almost immediately there was a shout from the officers.

"Hey! Welgand's gone!"

CHRIS whirled about in dismay, raced with the girl back to the spot. The floodlights were on it again now, but of Welgand there was no trace at all, only the flattened loam where he had dropped.

"But how could he—" demanded the squad sergeant helplessly.

"It wasn't poison, obviously," the girl snapped. "We were idiots to fall for that gag. Come on!"

But a careful search revealed nothing. What was significant, was that ten minutes later a rocket ship flared into the heavens half a mile away and rapidly climbed to the stars.

"So he had a space machine parked close by, in case of emergency," the girl sighed. "There goes Welgand! We know his name, his face, and his occupation, but— Well, there he goes!"

"We'll get him," vowed the police sergeant. "We've got a lead on him now. . . . Well, want a lift to town?"

Vi shook her head. "No, thanks. Be there later to make a report."

She stood with Chris watching the truck and cars make their way down the drive. She was smiling a little.

"It still rankles, Mrs. Wilson," Chris murmured.

"Rankles? What rankles, Mr.

Wilson?"

"The way you kidded me into thinking you were weak. Look at the risks and effort I went through!"

"Not entirely because you thought me weak," Vi murmured, her eyes on the stars. "But because you thought yourself strong. That was the idea—partly."

He caught her fondly in his arms. And even as he did so, the words she had just said echoed in his brain.

"That was the idea—partly," Vi had

said. *Partly.* Did the Golden Amazon have her vulnerable point too, Chris wondered....

But now was not the time for such thoughts.

"So you just wanted to give me a chance to prove myself!" he chuckled, holding the girl close.

"Isn't that what you wanted?"

Her lips pursed impudently, and her eyes were smiling.

"Not half so much," Chris said fervently, "as I want you!"

THE GENIUS OF LANCELOT BIGGS

(Concluded from page 103)

was the pioneer in the study of extra-sensory perception. I knew if I could just remember his name, I could think of a way to defeat Thaxton."

"But why the hell," I hollered, "did you have to think of Rhine's name? You knew all the other stuff. Your 'Get the theory first' didn't apply that time—because you already knew the theory. You just wasted time and nearly made the Cap and me nervous wrecks!"

The skipper said, "Now, Sparks, don't talk that way to Mr. Biggs—Come along, son."

But there was a look of utter dismay on my lanky pal's face. His Adam's apple dropped so far that he had indigestion for two days afterward. And he gasped,

"Oh, goodness, Sparks, you're right! But it never occurred to me in that way! All I could think of was that I *must* remember the name of the scientist before I could devise a solution!"

I tell you, folks, you ought to know him! That completely screwball, absolutely mad, incredible genius—Lancelot Biggs!

WAR and the British Radio Engineer!

The European War has not completely eliminated provided him with many unusual and interesting bomb detector and air raid protection "secretions." Lighted with many heretofore unknown revelations on what goes on "behind the scenes," Mr. Lewis has written this authentic account on radio's new role in England . . . exclusive in the May issue of **RADIO NEWS**. Don't fail to read "War Comes To The English Servicemen" . . . on page 8!

the civilian radio engineer in England, but has joined Radio has been called upon to serve as says E. J. G. Lewis, writing from London. High-

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Quiz Page

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific and pseudo-scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 50% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average. Give yourself 4 points for each correct answer.

TRUE AND FALSE

1. Pectin is a carbohydrate found in fruits, which causes jellies to set. True..... False.....
2. A paleontologist is a person who takes up the study of insects. True..... False.....
3. Roentgen rays are emissions given off by disintegrating radium. True..... False.....
4. Albumen is a protein found in the serum of the blood and whites of eggs. True..... False.....
5. Cytoplasm is all the protoplasm in a cell minus the nucleus. True..... False.....
6. Radon is a radioactive gas formed by the degradation of radium. True..... False.....
7. Myopia is a defect in vision in which images are formed by the crystalline lens in the eye in front of the retina instead of upon it. True..... False.....
8. Scientists have viewed the surface of Venus and found that it is rich in iron compounds. True..... False.....
9. Recently there has been a synthetic method discovered to produce artificial silk from coal. True..... False.....
10. Glycogen is a carbohydrate which is stored in the liver. True..... False.....
11. Tropism is the response of an organism to a particular stimulus, such as is shown by simple animals and plants. True..... False.....
12. Carbon dioxide is the gas that kills so many people in a closed garage in which a car is running. True..... False.....
13. Ivanovich Mendeleeff was a Russian scientist who discovered the periodic law and predicted three new elements. True..... False.....
14. A drone is a female bee or ant. True..... False.....
15. Aorta is the largest artery that originates at the left ventricle of the heart and carries pure blood to all parts of the body except the lungs. True..... False.....
16. Hertzian waves are tidal waves that are caused by the attraction of the moon upon

- the ocean. True..... False.....
17. Thrombin is the chemical responsible for the clotting of the blood. True..... False.....
18. Galileo was a scientist who was forced to publicly recant his belief that, "The Earth was the center of the solar system and the planets revolved around it." True..... False.....
19. One light year is equal to the distance light travels in one year. True..... False.....
20. Pectinococcus is the cocoon spun by the silk worm. True..... False.....

A BLANK CHOICE

Fill in the blanks with the numbers in which the correct statement follows.

- 1—An anion is — and a cation is —
 - 1—A positive charged ion of an electrolyte.
 - 2—A negative charged ion of an electrolyte.
 - 3—A gamete.
- 2—if you knew myxedema was — then you'd be sure synapse was — and tropism is —
 - 1—A reflex action of an organism.
 - 2—The point of contact of two neurons.
 - 3—The depression and failure of the thyroid gland.
- 3—Cerebellum is — and the cerebrum is —
 - 1—An enlarged portion of the forebrain in vertebrates.
 - 2—Green coloring matter found in plants.
 - 3—The anterior part of the hind brain devoted to function of muscular co-ordination.
- 4—Chromosomes are — and the chromatin are — while the nucleolus is —
 - 1—The main body cavity which surrounds the digestive tract.
 - 2—The chromatin made up of a particular set of genes.
 - 3—The deeply staining matter of the nucleus made up of genes.
- 5—A galaxy is — while ganglion is — and glycogen is —
 - 1—A group of island universes, consisting of billions of stars, of which our solar system is one unit.
 - 2—A mass of nerve cells functioning as the organ of nervous control in any region of the body.
 - 3—Animal starch.

(Answers on page 142)

»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

THE can be no doubt in the minds of any of the pioneer science fiction and fantasy readers that Phil Nowlan is a name that will be hard to equal on the contents page of the future. To those readers he wasn't a "person." He wasn't Mr. Phil Nowlan, of Bala-Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. He was "the author!"

Science fiction was still in its infancy when the first story from the capable typewriter of Phil Nowlan became a part of the line-up of a contents page. It was a story based on a character named Buck Rogers. Its title was *Armageddon, 2439 A.D.* It appeared in *Amazing Stories*, which was then pioneering the field. From the instant of its appearance on the stands, it was evident that here was an author who had "something on the ball."

There was a flood of approval in the form of glowing letters from the readers who found in Buck Rogers a type that appealed to their red-blooded imagination in an adventurous as well as scientific manner. "Let's have more of Buck Rogers!" they cried.

And as a result *The Adventures of H. H.*, once more featuring the exploits of the imitable 25th-century American, appeared on still another contents page. Buck Rogers was a good character. He proved it by never appearing again on the contents pages of that particular magazine! Because Buck Rogers went on to greater glory, to bigger contents pages,—to the comic sheets, the silver screen, to children's books, to the counters of the world's department stores, to the World's Fair, and even into the Halls of Pesterity as a living, breathing, human hero who was worshipped and admired by millions of "kids" and if the truth be told, by millions of "kids-at-heart."

Phil Nowlan, without any doubt, had crashed the "contents page" of the world in a big way!

But sometimes even a creator can become just a little bit tired of his creation. Phil Nowlan longed to vent his originality on something else. He wanted to return to the green pasture of ideas where he first created a character. So allowing Buck Rogers to coast along on his laurels, he turned back to science fiction, and gave to *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* the new character, Dan Hanley of Mars.

The Prince of Mars Returns was the name of the story, and you read it in the February and March issues of *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*. You rated it the same welcome Buck Rogers got on his first bow, and Phil Nowlan pocketed a prize award for writing an exceptionally good story.

Phil Nowlan hated to talk about himself. When we asked him for an autobiographical sketch for this department in February, he responded by talking about Buck Rogers. He did say, however, "I am just the Pop of another family of kids, who, about a decade ago, got so sick and

tired writing about business science and news that he went green in the face and revolted."

And that's the story of the man in a brief sentence. He was a rebel. A rebel who had ideas and had the courage to put them down on paper. He had the desire and the courage to swing away from the things that tied his irrepressible imagination to prosaic things and to express the real art that was in him.

Now, once more, he has "swung away," in a greater contents page. And those old pioneer readers can be certain that when we get to where he's gone, we'll find Phil Nowlan right at the top of that greater contents page with the lead story!



PHIL NOWLAN

READER'S PAGE

ELEVEN YEARS OLD

Sirs:

Believe it or not, I am a boy 11 years of age and have been reading science fiction for three years.

Paul's cover was superb (they always are). As for the stories, I rank Norris Tappley's *Sixth Sense* first. James Norman's *The Blue Tropics* did not appeal to me because it did not have enough adventure (not that I like all adventure stories).

All that's left for me to say is that FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is the best science fiction magazine I've ever read.

Robert Shapiro
1331 Southwood
St. Louis, Mo.

A great many of us, including your editor, began reading science fiction and fantasy at early ages. So, we readily believe your age. Glad to see you liked the Paul cover. We'll have more in the future and as for the stories, we'll try not to run any more like "The Blue Tropics" unless they have more action. You young readers would make good editorial assistants!—Ed.

A BACHELOR SPEAKS

Sirs:

Have been reading science fiction ever since the time of the *Second Deluge* and *The Moon Pool*, and old time classics in AMAZING STORIES in 1926. Your new magazine is okay, only one fault. You have too much love element. Give us bachelors a break now and then and print a real scientific adventure minus the beautiful girl. They are all right in their place, but I could never find a place for them in science fiction except in remote instances. Otherwise you're doing fine, and if a good weird yarn comes your way let's have it. I really like good weird fiction, but it's only once or twice a year that a real weird yarn pops up. They're scarce, the good ones.

C. Payler,
Route No. 3,
Yale, Mich.

Well, your editor must admit even a bachelor deserves a break, so we promise, we won't reject a good yarn because it has no girl in it. We have one in this issue, which only barely mentions a

girl, by Richard O. Lewis. We hope you like it!—Ed.

ONLY TWO THIN DIMES

Sirs:

I have just finished reading my first FANTASTIC ADVENTURES magazine, the March number. And I want to say I got plenty of good interesting reading for only two thin dimes.

I could hardly lay it down long enough even to eat until I read it through. To say you have a line of writers who know their business in story telling is putting it mild. I am passing this copy of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES to a friend and I'm pretty sure he will get as much enjoyment out of its high stepping adventure stories as I did.

Volcano Slaves of Ma by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr. was No. 1 story in my opinion. Because it has a way of holding the reader on the edge of his chair in thrilling excitement to the very last word; at least that's the way it held me. The other stories were more than interesting too. I also enjoyed the features.

Bill Wilks,
Route 1,
Idabel, Okla.

We certainly hope we don't destroy your first impression of our magazine. We've been fifteen years building science fiction up to where it is today, and when we can reach a new reader so swiftly we might say we've got something to feel pleased about. Also, thanks for passing us on to other readers. We can guarantee some fine stories coming up in future issues.—Ed.

NEVER VERY FOND?

Sirs:

As you already know, if you have read my previous letters, I have never been very fond of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Nevertheless, I believe in giving credit where credit is due. So . . .

1. I like your editorial page.
2. I like *Romance of the Elements*.
3. The April cover is by far the best to date, mainly because of the natural-looking background, partly because it displays Paul's undoubted ability to draw fantastic animal life.
4. In Ed Earl Rapp's *Norris Tappley's Sixth Sense* you have by far the best story to appear in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES to date.

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5. In transferring Lancelot Biggs to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, you have improved the magazine considerably, ditto for Meg, the Priestess, although the current Priestess story isn't quite as good as the first of the series.

But—I don't like your reader's page—almost entirely laudatory ravings.

Also, how about mentioning Phil Nowlan's death? He apparently wrote his last story for you.

D. B. Thompson,
3136 "Q" St.,
Lincoln, Nebr.

Another convert, apparently! You now list five items you like, and only one you dislike. And that you don't go for because it contains too much praise. How about your letter? It certainly hasn't much else but praise. A lot of our readers have commented on our readers' column, and the lack of criticism displayed. We cut the criticism out, they say.

Well, partly we do, BUT—only when the criticism is of a personal nature, either of readers criticizing other readers, or personal criticisms to the editor which have nothing to do with the stories or the general makeup, or criticism that is obviously not intended to be constructive. Other instances are those that occur when we display faulty judgment in selecting an occasional story, and it is generally disliked. Then our readers tell us in no uncertain terms where we made our mistake. Naturally, we can't print all these letters. We'd have a column just discussing one item in the magazine. That wouldn't make for variety.

If we had a great deal of criticism, it stands to reason we'd end up with a failure on our hands, and we certainly do not have that! Your own letter proves it.

Concerning Phil Nowlan's unfortunate death, see page 134.—Ed.

OTHER PLANETS FOR A CHANGE?

Sirs:

I have just finished reading one of your magazine issues and wish to say that I enjoyed it immensely. I can't use flowery terms and words in my descriptions, but I can say that in my opinion it rates tops.

I like Paul as a cover artist and suggest that you keep him and the splendid work that he is doing for the rest of the magazine's life.

The scientific quiz is the first thing I read in any of the current science-fiction magazines. I can say that I really enjoy this section more than any other in the whole magazine.

I like stories like the Moon Pool series, and like stories of interspatial and intergalactical adventure and conquest. Stories in which the characters undergo amazing transpositions and adventures with geniuses who make no errors and from whose captivity one can escape only by brilliant and far-reaching deductions.

One reads so much about Mars, Venus and Mercury, that it would be a treat if some author came

(Continued on page 138)

A MIRACLE / Happened!



DESERTED by the rescue expedition on the frozen wastes of Mt. Shasta, the stubborn young scientist, Clark Erick, grimly surged ahead in search of John Hillyer, head of Science House! Skidding, falling, crawling! . . . Suddenly Erick staggered, slipped! In another moment he was sliding down the chute to hell! As death reached for him a miracle happened! Down the slide, flashing like a white comet, came the figure of a girl! Ice screamed and crystal spray flew into Erick's face. Momentarily blinded, he saw the girl standing there with sharp cleats dug in, straining back with all her might to draw the scientist to safety! Had John Hillyer fallen into this same fantastic half-world? Was he, too, a prisoner in the hands of—well, of what? Of whom? Read the **PLANET OF BLACK TERROR** by Ed Earl Repp! You'll find this exciting story, brimming with thrilling adventure, suspense, and romance,

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"You're heading for a check-up!" warned the kid. He said it so often he succeeded in becoming a nuisance. But then . . .

★ SLAVE RAIDERS FROM MERCURY—by Don Wheat.

Lester Allison and June O'Neill found they faced more than death on Mercury; for instance, the Rite of the Floating Chapel.

★ TRAPPED ON TITAN—by David Wright O'Brien.

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**ON PAGE 110
OF THE BIG JUNE ISSUE**

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(Continued from page 136)
with a story about Uranus, Pluto or even Neptune for a change.

Louis Crimmins,
1004 N. Rampart St.,
New Orleans, La.

How about it, you authors? Why not take this reader's hint and write a few yarns about some of the other planets? We are pleased to see that you like our quiz pages. They really take a lot of our time. Try it yourself if you don't believe us. And incidentally, we might even buy a few good ones.

Yes, we sell all back issues of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. They are: May, July, September, November (1939), January, February, March, April, May (1940). Just address our circulation department, enclosing 20 cents per copy. We answer this question here because others of our readers continually ask this question and we answer any of you who desire copies, the best of service until they are exhausted.

How about Dr. Destiny, in this issue? He is one of those geniuses you want to read about.—Ed.

LARGE PRINT

Sirs:

Back in September 1939 I purchased my first issue of your magazine and now I have become a regular reader. I was attracted to your magazine by your large print because I read so much I must look out for my eyes. Since then I read it because of the editor's wise choice of stories which is one of the best I have come across in my experience with the editor's story choosing ability. For one thing, you can call on many of the best of the authors in the science fiction field and this alone would "make" a good magazine, but your editors also use their heads in picking the stories by these authors.

But I can't understand why you have not or at least in my experience used stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs. No one who read *The Scientists' Revolt* in the July '39 FANTASTIC ADVENTURES can't say he can't write the better class of science fiction stories. Marvin Godfrey,

Route 1, Box 408,
Fort Pierce, Fla.

Your editor too, might have been thinking of his eyes when he selected the size and style of print used in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Certainly a readable type is necessary to full enjoyment of any story.

We feel battered by your opinion of our story selecting ability. We'll try to live up to that reputation.

Burroughs doesn't usually write short length, and our last novel by him was a short novel. However, we plan to present something by him in a future issue, more than likely a novel length serial.—Ed.

FROM THE SEVENTEEN SONS OF SCIENTIFIC FICTION

Sirs:

With this, our third letter to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, we wish to extend our thanks for
(Concluded on page 140)

... HELL TOOK COMMAND OF TOLUAH ISLAND!!



THE hurricane turned the skies inside out, drenching flame and deluge impartially across the lovely island of Toluah! Minutes passed . . . minutes of terror and madness . . . destruction and horror! The staunch palms against which Steve, Brenda and Morn were bound, bowed terrifyingly to the Gods of storm! Steve clutched Brenda close to him, tightly, pressed his lips to hers, the freshness and beauty of her intoxicating his mind . . . yet she remained unconscious!

Alternately Steve prayed and cursed! . . . prayed for Brenda to open her eyes . . . cursed at the thought of Shash Koya, a yellow-bodied devil! But Morn was silent, lips tightly held together, eyes piercing through the drenching deluge toward the jungle . . . toward his native love, Hitani, and that fiendish Jap slaver, Koya, who held her captive! Here's an exciting story of the South Seas . . . 25,000 words that will hold you tense! Each magic sentence breathes of thrilling romance, intriguing adventure and rousing action! By all means, don't fail to read:

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QUIZ ANSWERS *(Quiz on page 133)*

A BLANK CHOICE

- 1—Two....One
 2—Three....Two....One
 3—Three....One
 4—Two..., Three....One
 5—One....Two....Three

TRUE AND FALSE

- | | | | |
|-----|--------|-----|--------|
| 1. | True. | 11. | True. |
| 2. | False. | 12. | False. |
| 3. | False. | 13. | True. |
| 4. | True. | 14. | False. |
| 5. | True. | 15. | True. |
| 6. | True. | 16. | False. |
| 7. | False. | 17. | False. |
| 8. | False. | 18. | False. |
| 9. | True. | 19. | True. |
| 10. | True. | 20. | True. |

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Kate Glaser, 452 Williams Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., wants pen pals. . . . Henry Andrew Ackermann, 5200 Maple Ave., Baltimore, Md., wants correspondents interested in playing chess by mail and discussing stf. . . . Warren Ross, 731 S. Grand, West Springfield, Ill., would like to correspond with S-F fans between 15 and 18. . . . Robert McTyre would like correspondents of either sex, about 15 yrs.; 202-09-43 Ave., Bayside, N. Y. . . . Frank Wilimczyk, Jr., 12 Dubois St., Westfield, Mass., has magazines for sale, 5¢ and up, and wishes to purchase cartoons; list your prices. . . . Vivian Crosby, 3333 Blanchard St., Toledo, Ohio, is desirous of pen pals between 19 and 24, but will answer letters from persons of any age; 21 yrs. . . . Morris Bush, 570 W. 156th St., N. Y. C., will accept reasonable offer for his early copies of AMAZING STORIES. . . . Hans K. Wein, 102 Beech St., Paterson, N. J., wants correspondents interested in chemistry. . . . Clinton Constantinescu, 3472 W. 58th St., Cleveland, Ohio, would like to examine back issues of AMAZING STORIES, 1932 through 1933. Anyone living in Cleveland and wishing to comply, get in touch with him. . . . June Glidewell, 2006 Rainier Ave., Everett, Wash., wants to hear from both sexes, anywhere, about anything; 22 yrs. . . . Genevieve Baird, 2006 Rainier Ave., Everett, Wash., is desirous of hearing from either sex around 40 yrs. . . . Donald A. Dow, 617 Eggert Rd., Buffalo, N. Y., wants pen pals in U. S. A. and foreign countries interested in S-F, match book covers, etc. . . . Louis Rabinowitz, 2635 N. Hampden Ct., Chicago, Ill., wants to get in touch with a fan club in Chicago; 15 yrs. . . . Mark Reinsberg, 3156 Cambridge Ave., Chi-

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